Presented to
The Library
of the
University of Toronto
by

Mrs. S. T. Blackwood

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/marcovisconti00grosuoft

THE LITERATURE OF ITALY

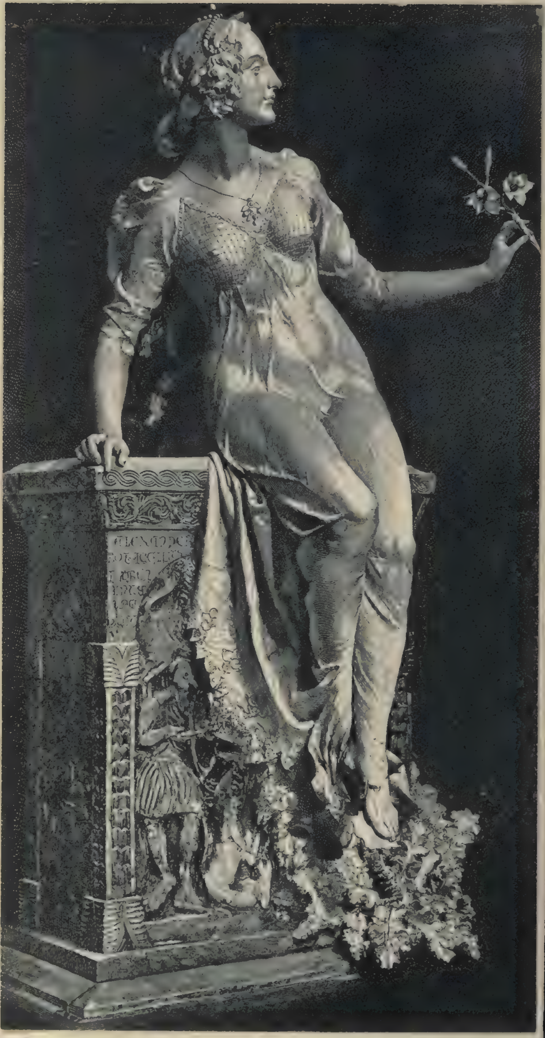
consists of sixteen volumes, of which this one forms a part. For full particulars of the edition see the Official Certificate bound in the volume entitled

"A HISTORY OF ITALIAN LITERATURE."

BINDING

THE binding on this volume is a facsimile of the original on exhibition among the Treasures of the Vatican, and is here reproduced, by special permission, for the first time.

It is an Italian binding of the middle of the sixteenth century (1549). The cover is ornamented with an extraordinary geometrical and arabesque design, parts of which are blind stamped with heated tools to change the color of the leather.



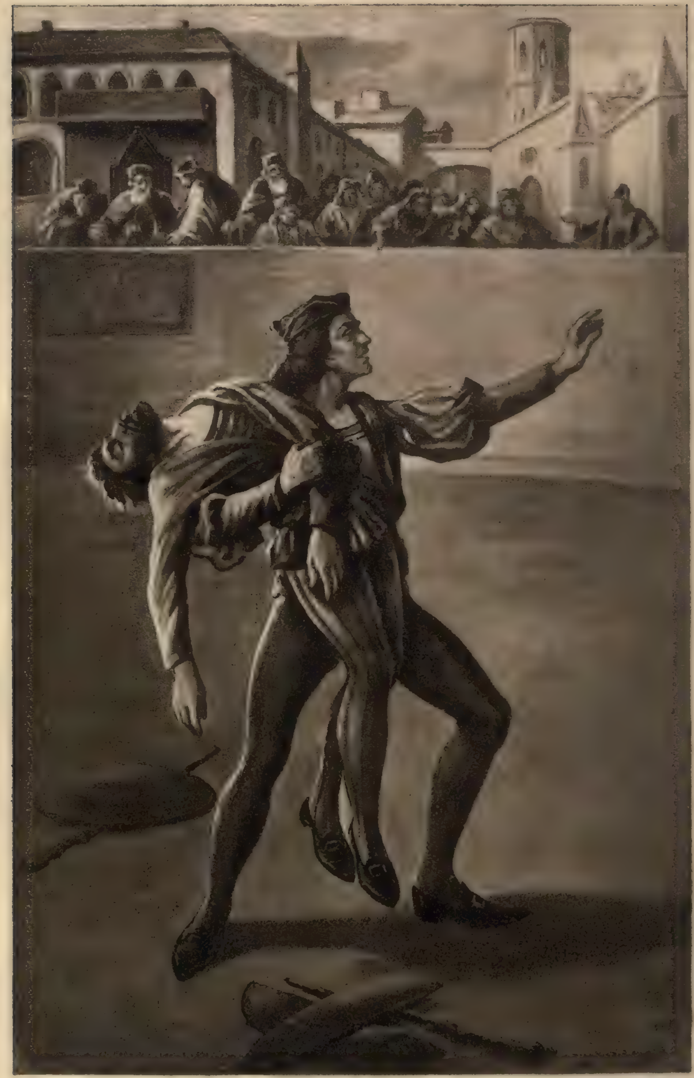
The Literature of Italy
1265 — 1907.

Edited by Rossiter Johnson and Dora Knowlton Ranous

With a General Introduction by William Michael Rossetti and Special Introductions by James, Cardinal Gibbons, Charles Eliot Norton, S. G. W. Benjamin, William S. Walsh, Maurice Francis Egan, and others

New translations, and former renderings compared and revised

Translators: James C. Brogan, Lord Charlemont, Geoffrey Chaucer, Hartley Coleridge, Florence Kendrick Cooper, Lady Dacre, Theodore Dwight, Edward Fairfax, Ugo Foscolo, G. A. Greene, Sir Thomas Hoby, William Dean Howells, Luigi Monti, Evangeline M. O'Connor, Thomas Okey, Dora Knowlton Ranous, Thomas Roscoe, William Stewart Rose, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, John Addington Symonds, William S. Walsh, William Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Wyatt



HE HOISTED HIM ON HIS SHOULDER, AND RAN AROUND THE LISTS WITH HIM

From an Original Drawing by Joseph A. Espelt

MARCO VISCONTI

BY

TOMMASO GROSSI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

THE NATIONAL ALUMNI

COPYRIGHT, 1907, BY
THE NATIONAL ALUMNI

PQ
4705
G6M313
1907
656870
24. 4. 57

CONTENTS

PAGE
INTRODUCTION VII
CHAPTER I—Serfs or Freemen? 1
CHAPTER II—The People Act 11
CHAPTER III—Queen of Love and Beauty 23
CHAPTER IV—The Ordeal of Single Combat 34
CHAPTER V—A Fatal Storm 41
CHAPTER VI—The Maiden's Secret 55
CHAPTER VII—The Story of Marco and Ermelinda . . 71
CHAPTER VIII—Marco at Home 85
CHAPTER IX—Ottorino Makes a Proposal 95
CHAPTER X—The Banquet 106
CHAPTER XI—Love and Sorrow 117
CHAPTER XII—A Dark Plot 128
CHAPTER XIII—A Plea for Life 139
CHAPTER XIV—A Wild Ride 148
CHAPTER XV—Out from the Shadow 159
CHAPTER XVI—Gathering at the Lists 173
CHAPTER XVII—A Tournament 185
CHAPTER XVIII—Mortal Combat 194
CHAPTER XIX—The Lord of Lucca 203

PAGE
CHAPTER XX—Reënforcements for Milan 213
CHAPTER XXI—Ingenuity and Valor 222
CHAPTER XXII—A Marriage 229
CHAPTER XXIII—An Abduction 233
CHAPTER XXIV—Unconscious Prisoners 241
CHAPTER XXV—A Practical Joke 250
CHAPTER XXVI—A Waiting Bride 264
CHAPTER XXVII—Suspicion 275
CHAPTER XXVIII—A Perilous Journey 287
CHAPTER XXIX—A Mother's Appeal 294
CHAPTER XXX—The Search 302
CHAPTER XXXI—Too Late! 319
CHAPTER XXXII—The Catastrophe 333

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

He hoisted him on his shoulder, and ran around the lists with him (Page 40) . . . . Frontispiece

Visconti seemed to see in the girl before him her own mother 154

A cry was raised by many voices: "She is here! She is found!" 320

INTRODUCTION

BEFORE Fogazzaro or D'Annunzio or Matilde Serao broke the traditions of the romantic school, to mention modern Italian literature was to think of Manzoni and Grossi. *I Promessi Sposi*, long known in English as *The Betrothed*, by Alessandro Manzoni, was the first novel that stood out from the background of the over-effusive, over-passionate and very Byronic works of the Italian romanticists of the early nineteenth century. And the second classic of Italian fiction was *Marco Visconti*, by Tommaso Grossi. Manzoni and Grossi were close friends, and, in their attitude toward literature, were idealists and sentimentalists. Both were poets, who wrote, perhaps unconsciously, prose masterpieces, while their poetry, on which they lavished great care—and, we can easily imagine, even tears—is forgotten. But an exception to this statement must be made in the case of the little lyric by Grossi, with its refrain, *Poverella rondinella*, of which William Dean Howells has made a charming version in his *Italian Poets*.

> Pilgrim swallow—pilgrim swallow!
>   On my grated window sill,
> Singing as the mornings follow,
>   Quaint and pensive ditties still,
> What wouldst tell me in thy lay,
>   Prithee, pilgrim swallow, say!

And this occurs, not in the poetic works of Grossi, but in the twenty-sixth chapter of *Marco Visconti*, where the jester and poet, Tremacoldo, sings it for the consolation of the imprisoned Beatrice, and this *rondinella*, with its recurring refrain, "Swallow, ever wandering swallow," is as well known to-day in Milanese households as "Santa Lucia" is at Naples or Venice.

Of Grossi's works, only *Marco Visconti* and the swallow-song are well remembered, and both deserve to be well remembered. The novel is most interesting, though it is a series of detached episodes rather than one central action, the foundation for the construction. It is a vivid picture of Italian feeling and Italian action in the middle of the fourteenth century, before Chaucer had begun to write in England, while Dante and the circle of poets about him had made a finished literature. One of the chief values of Grossi's method is that, without affectation of pedantry, he gives you the point of view of the time. You are carried into the depths of the Middle Ages, and, if you yield to his spell, you find yourself looking at life from the point of view of Marco, the splendid prince, and of the troubador and jester, Tremacoldo, who has been a priest and will be again a priest. The heroine, Beatrice, is like a hundred heroines of romance, compact of all the virtues; and Ottorino, the leading juvenile lover, has no distinguishing qualities from the *genre* to which he belongs; but Visconti and the over-prudent father, Count Oldrado, Lupo, the ready-witted and indomitable squire, and the poet Tremacoldo—a kind of Italian François Villon—are of the soil and the time, distinct, and so graphically presented as to seem alive, and to be remembered with the immortal folk in *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*. The scene is laid in Lombardy, beloved of Grossi, and the time and circumstances chosen are alien to modern sympathies, because both the time and the circumstances seem at first sight incomprehensible to us. And the charm of Grossi is, that he is as simple and *naïve* in his view of life—so far as mediæval romance goes—as are his characters, the Lombard lords and peasants. It was an age of terrible elementary passions and unquestioning primitive faith. The Duchy of Milan was under an interdict; no ecclesiastical function could be performed, and no man could confess or be absolved unless in danger of death. The Milanese were not only of the Ghibelline faction, adherents of the Emperor, but they had accepted the jurisdiction of Pietro da Corvano, whom the Bavarian Emperor Louis had declared Pope as Nicholas V, in opposition to the legitimate Pope John XXII, who held court at Avignon. The inhabitants of the land about Lake Como—a simple and non-political people, mostly peasants—refused to return to the performance of public worship at the command of the anti-Pope. Vital as all the observances of religion were to them, they refused because Pope John included the whole duchy in his interdict. Those who went to mass offered by a Ghibelline priest, the creature of the Emperor's puppet, were, on the borders of Como, looked upon as heretics. The usages of religion entered into every detail of domestic life. A tournament to decide guilt or innocence, was not valid legally unless the combatants had the blessing of a priest; but a priest that was orthodox could not give this blessing. The admirable passages in which a test of arms is described shows how Lupo, by a subterfuge, made his position legal, and how the jester-priest, Tremacoldo, escaped committing what he, as a faithful adherent of the rightful Pope, looked on as sacrilege. In time, when the magnificent Marco Visconti threw himself against the anti-Pope, and John XXII was about to triumph, Tremacoldo sees his way to change his lute to a psalter.

Dante, who had been dead eight years, was looked on by the Guelphs as a pestiferous Ghibelline. The Count, Beatrice's father, is a Guelph, who, however, wishes to stand well with his powerful Ghibelline neighbors. Beatrice, perplexed and unhappy through the suspected double-dealing of her lover, Ottorino, takes from her table the fashionable book of "devils and tortured souls." This is the *Inferno,* the only part of the *Commedia Divina* then known in Lombardy, where it was as much the vogue as *Clarissa Harlowe* was in later days in London and Bath.

"Beatrice," Grossi says, "pursued this study, unknown to her mother, and even the Count required a great deal of urging before allowing her to read the book. It was not at all that he was afraid that the *Commedia Divina* would not be proper reading for a young girl; it was only because of an old grudge that he had against Alighieri on account of the Latin work entitled *De Monarchia,* published by that staunch Ghibelline many years before." *De Monarchia* had begun to make a great noise in Italy and Germany. "This poisonous book was burned by the common hangman," the Count tells us. It was afterward taken off the *Index,* and, though a flaming brand in its day, it is now regarded—by those who put Dante, as Raphael did, in the *Disputa,* among the doctors of the Church—as a youthful indiscretion.

Marco Visconti, the fierce Lord of Milan, who loves, hates, and revenges with tumultuous power, is a type very misty and unreal to us until we see his picture drawn by a hand like that of Grossi, who is an artist, with few of the lapses of taste that repel us in the romances of his school. And the translator, in Chapter VIII, makes us see him as vividly as we see him walking and speaking through the transparent Italian of Grossi. He delighted to kill an enemy with his own hand. He wore the *misericordie,* that dagger which had given many an enemy the *coup de grâce,* permanently at his belt, and set its handle with rubies, like drops of blood. Matteo, his father, had died excommunicated by the Pope, and Marco, who had been high in favor with the Ghibellines, who had slain, ravaged and relentlessly killed all who, in the interest of the Church, opposed him, suddenly demands that his relative, Ottorino, shall become a Guelph and acknowledge Pope John. At heart, this tyrannous and unscrupulous Prince has fear of the thunder of the Church. The memory of his father has often taken the joy from his victories. He weeps bitter tears because he cannot be buried in consecrated ground. Marco tells Ottorino that his father's despair is always with him. The young man is amazed. He has been brought up to believe that John is the heretic, and Nicholas the rightful Pope; Marco has told him so himself many times. Marco smiles gloomily, but, with all his desire not to die excommunicated, he distinguishes between the human and the temporal sides of the Church; his nephew ought to be grateful to the dogs of anti-Pope followers—vile Ghibellines—who have forced him back to the way of salvation.

Grossi's study of Visconti is the study of a typical Italian lord of the fourteenth century. Though ready to defy the Pope at a moment's notice for political reasons, and often distrusting and sometimes hating him personally, he acknowledged and feared the spiritual force that he represented, and, by a curious illogic, wondered and believed, lied and oppressed, always in the hope that in the end he might die free from the ban of the Church. Machiavelli, in *The Prince,* has given us the clue to the politics of Catherine de' Medici and Elizabeth of England; Grossi gives us, in his presentment of Marco, a complete picture of that very difficult creature of the Middle Ages, a *grand seigneur,* who was a prince, a bandit, a childlike believer, and a materialist with an ideal. The relations of Lupo—the god in the machine of the romance—with the soldier whose life, for a good cause, he tried to take, are equally typical. Lupo is condemned to death. Vinciguerra, the soldier that has escaped death at his hands, says he will not drink Lupo's health in wine, but he will save the price to reward the priests for saying masses for his soul.

Modern novels, dealing with that time, all suffer by comparison with *Marco Visconti* because their authors, in spite of their archaisms, cannot get rid of the point of view of their own time. It is different with Grossi; he loves and comprehends these early Italians as he loves his Lake Como and interprets all its moods.

And Grossi adored this lake. He was born near it, at Bellano, in 1791. He was destined for the law, and studied at the University of Pavia. He deserted Pavia for Milan, and also law for literature. He became early the apostle of the lachrymose and pathetic. Charles Dickens himself had no greater power of drawing tears than Grossi. The ladies loved his moving story of *Ildegonda*. It was in verse, and the patient Gresildis could not have suffered more than this ill-fated little novice. Horror is piled on horror so high that one wonders how an author so lacking in the sense of proportion and the value of agony for artistic purposes, could later have written the sane, well-arranged, and delightfully human *Marco Visconti*. His poem *I Lombardi alla Prima Cruciata* caused him to be hailed as superior to Tasso, or at least his equal; but it is now as forgotten as the minor knights and palmers of that first crusade, whose names are known only to Heaven. *Marco Visconti* is the result of Grossi's highest talent—one may almost say genius. He appears to have been happy, fortunate in his marriage and in his friendships. After his marriage, which occurred in his maturity, he contented himself with the renown of being the second novelist in Italy, gladly yielding the first place to his friend Manzoni, under whose roof he dwelt for many years. He devoted himself to law. The morality of his great novel is good, and, if the art seems to be too romantic for the realists, one can honestly say, after reading it, that it makes for righteousness. It is both a romance and a novel, as are most of the books of the adorable Walter Scott; for it has the interest of action and the charm of sympathetic characters. We are lured by episodes and are led on by our desire to know how other persons think and live; and this is the chief value of a novel that bears the test of many readings.

Maurice Francis Egan.

CHAPTER I

SERFS OR FREEMEN?

LIMONTA is a small tract of country covered with chestnut woods, which almost hide it from persons sailing from the point of Bellagio toward Lecco, between which places it is about halfway, and immediately opposite Lierna. From the eighth century to the time when feudal tenures in Lombardy were abolished, Limonta was an appanage of the monastery of San Ambrogio at Milan, whose abbot added to his other titles that of Count of Limonta.

At the point where the abbot's territory joined the district of Bellagio, and where a stone still marks the boundary, there was in 1329 an old castle, which was razed to the ground toward the end of that century.

This castle, at the date of our story, belonged to a certain Count Oldrado del Balzo, whose ancestors appear to have been at one time suzerains of Bellagio, now fallen under municipal rule. The Count Oldrado, though possessed of other estates in Lombardy, spent the greater part of the year here, in the society of his wife and an only daughter, who were, like himself, devotedly attached to their beautiful lake, which was set off by the fine sky, and the soft, joyous, and luxurious climate of Italy.

Rich, illustrious, and powerful, the family of Balzo had always been considered the natural protectors of the inhabitants of the district, all of whom, from father to son, had a traditional reverence and affection for the family name.

But, though Count Oldrado had succeeded to such a noble inheritance, he had not understood how to maintain it, and had forfeited in some degree the good feeling of the old vassals of the house. Not that his disposition was really bad, for he was, on the contrary, a good kind of man; but it fell to his lot to live in hard times and in difficult circumstances. He was weak, timid, and vain, and was not endowed with the requisite vigor for effecting as much good as he would otherwise have desired.

About that time the Emperor Louis, the Bavarian, had made a raid into Italy, and had deposed the reigning Sovereign Pontiff, John XXII, then resident at Avignon, by whom he had been excommunicated, and had set up an anti-Pope at Rome, in the person of one Pietro da Corvaria, a Minorite friar, who took the name of Nicholas V, whence arose that great schism which disturbed all Christendom.

The Duchy of Milan, which had so long groaned under the interdict fulminated against it on account of the Pope's hatred of the Visconti, as determined adherents of the Ghibelline faction, declared at once for the anti-Pope. After the latter had in return removed the interdict from the Milanese capital, as well as from other minor towns and the more considerable villages, the churches were re-opened, and the few remaining clergy resumed their ecclesiastical functions. But in the country, especially around the Lake of Como, the people, less influenced by party spirit, remained faithful to the true Pope, and refused to open the churches, regarding the priests sent to them from the capital as schismatics and excommunicate. There were, as may be supposed, in the towns many who sympathized with the peasantry, and among the inhabitants of the country districts some that shared the views of the majority of the townspeople; so that life was not altogether pleasant in those unfortunate times, few places being free from profanation, violence, and sanguinary strife between the rival religious factions. Frate Aicardo, Archbishop of Milan, and the Abbot of San Ambrogio, together with most of the abbots of the richer and more distinguished monasteries, had already sought refuge in flight; and the choicest portion of the clergy, both regular and secular, were begging their way through Italy and France. The archiepiscopal revenues, the abbeys, and the minor ecclesiastical benefices were either forcibly seized and retained by the lay lords, or else given up to schismatic priests, partisans of the German Emperor.

In this perturbed state of affairs, Giovanni Visconti, a relative of the princely family of that name, who had been appointed Abbot of San Ambrogio in the place of the true Abbot Astolfo da Lampugnano, had sent to Limonta, as steward of the monastery, a thorough-paced scoundrel, who had been condemned at Milan for coining and forgery. This man, in revenge for the fidelity with which these poor mountaineers served their liege lords, robbed and fleeced them without mercy, besides adding insult to injury by treating them as rebels. The people of Limonta turned to Count Oldrado, and besought him to use his influence with the new abbot, and also to intercede with the nobles so as to get their rights recognized. But they soon found it was labor lost.

The Count had so many scruples and fears that he would not commit himself to anything, nor risk falling into disfavor with the Visconti; and, though pitying in his heart these unhappy victims, he would have left them to be flayed alive rather than make up his mind to stir a finger to help them.

Pelagrua (for such was the name of the steward of the monastery) became more audacious every day, and at last bethought him of a plan to ruin, at one blow, all the people under his authority, by a bold act of rascality which would hand them over to him—body and soul, so to speak—once for all, and so spare him the necessity of perpetually contending with individuals. He set to work, therefore, to unearth some old documents relating to Lothair Augustus's gift of all these lands to the monks of San Ambrogio. Armed with these, he meant to cause the people of Limonta to be adjudged not only vassals, as they were, but serfs of the monastery, and to summon them for this purpose before the tribunals of Bellano.

Bellano was then under the Archiepiscopal Court, by which term was meant an estate where the lord of the fief had his mansion and chapel, and the place where he administered justice; hence the decision of a suit of this nature properly belonged to the archbishop's officials. But the archbishop having fled from the diocese, many estates belonging to him on the shores of Lecco and in Val Sessina, and among them this very Court of Bellano, had been appropriated by one Cressone Crivello, a powerful noble and partisan of the Visconti; and therefore the case of these Limonta people had now to be decided, not by the archiepiscopal officials, but by those of Crivello. This new lord was too open a friend of the false abbot of San Ambrogio, and too much interested in favoring the oppressions that he himself incessantly exercised upon his new vassals, for anything but evil to be expected from him for Limonta. The Limontese did not fail to cry out loudly or to do their best to gain Count del Balzo over to their side. All their efforts, however, were thrown away. The Count, although implored both by his wife, Ermelinda, and by his daughter Beatrice, who was as the apple of his eye, did not dare to undertake the defense of the wretched peasantry, who had to submit to be dragged before that incompetent and iniquitous tribunal, and await a sentence which they too well knew would be mere judicial murder.

Toward evening, on the day of the trial, the Count's falconer was standing on the battlements of the castle, and gazing down the lake as far as his eye could reach, to see whether any of the vessels were in sight which were expected back from Bellano. At last he descried in the distance a brown sail, which gradually increased in size as the bark that bore it neared the castle, and he at once hastened to carry the news to his lord. The Count was seated in a spacious hall, in an armchair with a pointed back; and a gay young page, lively as a Cupid, reclined on a low footstool at his feet. Condemned by his office to remain quiet in his place, the boy amused himself by playing with a large greyhound, which wagged its tail and pricked its ears with delight, and bounded about the hall in response to the caresses given to it.

Count del Balzo was a man nearer fifty than forty years of age. From a square black cap two locks of hair fell on his temples; once they had been of a deep red, which, when young, he had called, and still continued to call auburn, although now they were decidedly grizzled, and even might be said to be white. A thin and freckled face ended in a sharp chin, on which, whenever the Count spoke, wagged a stiff, short beard of the same color as his hair. Two small gray eyes glared beneath his eyebrows, with an expression that had not lost its fire; but vanity and self-satisfaction were the main characteristics of that wooden face, with its artificially pursed-up mouth.

He bore on his wrist a superb gerfalcon, which seemed to revel in his caresses—now arching its neck, and uttering a low cry; now ruffling its feathers, and feigning occasionally to peck gently at the hand that approached it. When the falconer entered the hall the noble bird at once recognized its trainer, and, with outstretched wings and a somewhat louder cry, seemed to invite him to take it on his wrist.

"Well," asked the Count, "are they coming from Bellano?"

"Yes, my Lord, they are. Michael and his son Arigozzo have just debarked on the beach at Carneccio."

The Count, on hearing this, handed over the falcon to the page, who left the room with it, while he and the falconer remained to await the arrival of the two boatmen, who soon afterward entered the apartment.

The party consisted of Michael, the father, a man well on in years, and Arigozzo, the son, a fine young man, about twenty-eight years of age.

"What news?" the Count asked the old man.

"God's will be done!"

"Come; tell me everything."

"Well, then, I will tell you how it was: the bell rang, and there appeared in the archbishop's portico that excommunicated wretch in the midst of three or four scribes and Pharisees, who began to mutter out some cock-and-bull story, out of a lot of old parchments, fit only to wrap up salt fish, which he kept tapping with his hand, as if he expected them to utter a confirmation of his impostures. At last he changed his note, and began to tell the following falsehood: 'There was,' he said, 'evidence that the people of Limonta had always been serfs of the monastery, and he alleged as a proof that we always had had our heads shaved, and that it was but a short time since our hair was allowed to grow.' Could anything be more infamous than that?"

"But were there no witnesses?" asked the Count.

"There was no lack of them," answered Michael. "You may be sure that some would be found, even if our Lord were to be crucified afresh. There are plenty of people that would swear to anything for the sake of a cask of figs—a set of excommunicated Ghibellines who would sell their souls to the devil."

"And what happened then?"

"After that crafty old fox had finished, our advocate, Lorenzo da Garbagnate, began to state our side of the case. He said plainly enough that we were neither the abbot's vassals nor his serfs, and that all we have done for the last hundred years has been to pay him his dues in the shape of poll-tax and tithes; to lend him our labor during the olive and chestnut harvest; to load his boats; and, in fact, to do just what we were bound to do, and no more. And then he finished up with a most extraordinary expression, which he said was in our favor. Don't you recollect, Arigozzo?"

"I remember he said something," replied the son, "about some right we had, but I never heard of such a thing before."

"Did he say that you were no longer serfs by prescriptive right?" suggested the Count.

"That's it! The very thing!" exclaimed both father and son.

"You see," said the Count, "I have all such matters at my fingers' ends."

"Then, to prove this fact," proceeded Michael, "our advocate brought forward his honest witnesses, consisting of the old inhabitants from all parts of the country."

"Then all appeared settled, did it not?" was the reply.

"No, my Lord. That Pilate of a judge invented something new, and said there were so many witnesses on both sides ready to swear to anything that the case never would end: it must be decided by the Ordeal of God."

"The Ordeal of God!" exclaimed the Count.

"So he said," continued Michael; "and all the people began to applaud, as if he had given ever so fine a judgment. One called for the 'Ordeal of Hot Iron.' 'Boiling Water,' exclaimed another. 'The Ordeal of the Crosses,' said I, and told my Arigozzo here to offer himself on behalf of Limonta, which he accordingly did."

"And did they accept him?"

"No," said Michael; "because they were a set of rogues.

But I have seen it written that there is no danger in the Ordeal of the Crosses. When I was a boy, I was once the champion, so to speak, of the monastery, and won a cause for them against Bellagio."

"Come, don't go on forever," interrupted Count Oldrado, "but let us go back to our subject. What was settled at last?"

"There was a fine ending," said the other, "the abbot's advocate would have the Ordeal by Single Combat, and the archbishop's deputy of course agreed with the other, and so there was an end of it."

"A duel with cudgels and shields?" asked the Count; "because as it is an affair between common people, they have no right to weapons of chivalry."

"Yes," replied Michael, "with cudgels and shields."

"And who will fight for you?" asked the Count.

"Ah, that's only too quickly answered. But let me tell you first who has offered himself for the monastery: a great demon with red hair and broad shoulders."

"Then you have not accepted the ordeal, you lazy cowards!" exclaimed Del Balzo.

"My Arigozzo wished to come forward," replied Michael, "but I would not have it. 'Twould be the last drop in my cup of misery were I to risk losing my son, who is the only comfort of his mother and myself, now that we are old and have no one else in the world to look to." And, turning to his son, he took him by the arm, and added, "Look well to yourself, and take care not to mix yourself up in the affair. I won't have it, unless you wish to kill me and your mother."

"You have said so to me three times already," answered Arigozzo; "so there is no help for it. Well, there are still four days left to find a champion."

"And for these four days I shall keep you shut up at home," said his father. "I'll stay to look after you—and you shall not defy me."

"Oh! bother take the man!" said the son, shrugging his shoulders with a rough but affectionate gesture, and the subject dropped.

Then Ambrose joined in the conversation. "And cannot we find a champion?" he said. "Why not get one of those fellows who will do anything for money? Pay him well, and let him fight for the rights of the country."

"No," replied the Count, stroking his beard with one hand, "that cannot be. The privilege of putting forward for the ordeal a champion not personally interested belongs to the nobility and the religious orders alone."

"Then," continued the other, "we must either all be ruined, or get some native of Limonta to fight with the champion of the monastery."

"Just so," said the Count.

"Oh! if my Lupo were at home," exclaimed the falconer, "or somewhere that I could let him know in time, those swaggering fellows should not have it all their own way."

"Tell me," asked Michael, "is not your Lupo page to Ottorino Visconti?"

"Yes," said the falconer; "he was page at first, when he went away five years ago; but now he is his squire, and the noble lord is very fond of him, and never likes to be without him."

On hearing this the boatman looked greatly relieved, and exclaimed, "Then let us be off to Como at once, without losing a moment."

"What!" said the falconer. "Do you know that my Lupo is at Como?"

"I know," said Michael, "that Ottorino Visconti is there;" and turning to his son, he added, "You saw him, too, you know, when we were there on Tuesday."

"What! Was he that young knight who saluted us on the pier, and spoke to you?" said Arigozzo.

"Exactly so," replied his father.

"Oh! I saw him; and it was the same who was such a friend to poor Count Lionello—bless his sainted soul! —my Lord's son here, and who stayed months at the castle to bear him company."

"Then," exclaimed the boatman joyfully, "let us go home and take a mouthful, and be off directly, while the lake is smooth. The boat is ready, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered his son; "sails, oars, awnings are all there, as, in order to get here without delay, I did not take anything out."

The father laid his hand on his son's arm, bowed to the Count, and made for the door, saying to the falconer, "Shall I tell him all my news in your name?"

"Yes, do so. Say everything in my name," was the answer.

"Good-by, then, till to-morrow," said the other; "you will see me back with him," and went off.

"Michael," cried the Count after him, "remember to act as on your own account. Don't let anyone think I have had a hand in the matter. I don't wish to get into trouble for you. Do you understand?"

"I understand," replied the boatman.

CHAPTER II

THE PEOPLE ACT

THE next day, which was Sunday, the small church of San Bernardo at Limonta was open, and mass was being said by a friar sent from Milan, as the parish priest had left his cure on account of the interdict, and for this reason was still a fugitive in deadly fear of Pelagrua, who had vowed his ruin. The only persons, however, present at this service were the steward, or proctor, and his family. The people of Limonta, and also many from Civenna and Bellagio, were scattered about the little square, discussing the great event of the day before, the baseness and perfidy of Pelagrua, and whether it were yet possible to avert evil consequences.

Several armed ruffians were marching in the square, trying to get the people into church; but the populace were too firm in their opinions, too irritated by late events, too numerous to allow themselves to be persuaded by fine words, or to be intimidated by the scowls of a handful of swashbucklers. The latter, at last, seeing they could do no good, gave way, and contented themselves with standing sentinel at the door of the church, and from that position attempting to induce those of the crowd who were nearest to them to take off their hats or bow their heads in reverence to the mass. But the people all persisted in standing erect, and keeping on their hats, and amused themselves with passing in front of the sentries, laughing at them, pushing them about, and provoking them with whistling and other noises.

Pelagrua, who was in church, kneeling near the altar, turned his head at these noises, and seeing so many sinister faces and such rough behavior, began to feel alarmed, and wished himself and his family back in his own house.

The celebrating priest, too, under pretence of sending to the choir for some of the sacred altar-vessels, turned and saw the scoffing crowd. The Epistle and the Gospel never seemed to him so long, so he cut his discourse as short as he could. Meanwhile, popular excitement was rising outside.

"What an infamous injustice this is, and how quietly we are taking it!" cried a Limonta lad.

"Why don't you go to Bellano and offer yourself as our champion?" rejoined an old white-haired man who stood by.

"That's a nice idea, good shepherd!" replied the first speaker. "Fight with that fellow! He's a sorcerer, and has a hundred charmed herbs woven into his clothes that make his skin tough."

"Stefanolo is right. He is well known to be a magician," said another. "They chose him because no one could hope to pit himself against him and escape with a whole skin. Those heretic hounds are all agreed together to torment us."

"It would serve them right," resumed the first speaker, "to begin to do justice for ourselves before they make us lose both body and soul."

"You are quite right to speak of losing body and soul," said one of the bystanders, "seeing that the devil himself, in the shape of Pelagrua, is going to mass, now that to do so is a mortal sin; formerly, when it was the proper thing to do, he didn't trouble himself about it, and now he only goes to draw us on to our ruin."

"Why, he's always been a heretic," went on Stefanolo; "and whoever knew him in former days knows he was excommunicated by our archbishop, and condemned to wear black crosses stitched on his cloak."

"And his trade, before coming here to bully us, was to forge banknotes," cried a fresh speaker; "I have often seen him, when I have been at Milan at Christmas, to carry fish to the monastery for the quit-rent. I've seen him painted on the wall of the new Broletto, and with a placard underneath, with his name and surname."

"Burn the house!" "Hang the villain!" "Throw him into the lake!" cried out many voices from the crowd, which kept closing round the speakers.

Just then the mass came to an end, and Pelagrua, surrounded by his bravoes, issued from the church on his way to the monastery. The people began to press round, crying out, "Take the heretic, hang him, quarter him, murder him!" making a great noise, as may be conceived, but without harming anyone. Hardly was the procurator inside the threshold, when the door was banged in the face of the crowd, and good-night was the word. On this the mob redoubled their shouts, but as no mischief had really occurred, the storm would have passed away, had it not been for an unlucky outburst of revenge on the part of some of Pelagrua's braggadocios, who, feeling humiliated at having retreated before a mob of clowns (as they called their opponents), were longing to be at them. Some of them, having got up into a turret beside the door, began to jeer at the crowd and irritate them in every way they could, and declared they would soon make them rue their insolence. On this the outsiders, becoming exasperated, began throwing stones, but without hitting their mark, which only made the opposite side increase their taunts, till at last one of the rogues above had his arm struck by a stone, and, turning quickly to pick up the offending flint, threw it down with all his force, when unluckily it dropped on the head of a child, nine or ten years old, who was among the crowd, shouting as loud as the rest. The boy had his skull fractured, and died in less time than one could repeat a paternoster.

This mishap was like a spark falling into a powder-magazine. The crowd, almost mad with rage, gave a general howl of execration, and shouted for vengeance. In the twinkling of an eye the door was smashed in. The bullies that ran up were dashed to the ground, and a wave of people, rushing through the long passage, poured into the first courtyard. In a moment the house was full of terror and confusion. Doors and windows were fastened in haste, as at the sudden approach of a tempest, and the shrieks of frightened women were heard, as they crossed the galleries pursued by the invaders. Groans and cries arose, together with blows, and prayers for mercy. The few wretches who remained in the tower had no time to save themselves. The people rushed up there furiously, and with their usual impulsive ideas of justice, threw them, one after another, down the castle rock, so as to break every bone in their bodies.

Pelagrua, who was rushing madly about the house, was seized, together with five of his satellites, and tied in a chain with them. Some of the people wished to hurl them headlong from the tower; others to drop them into the lake with stones round their necks; some advised hanging, and others burying alive with the head downward. This last proving the favorite idea, some of the mob ran off to fetch pickaxes and spades, and began to prepare some large holes in front of the church.

The wretched steward, white as a sheet, with his gray hair standing upright on his head, with staring, vacant eyes, ashy lips trembling, and teeth chattering, kept repeating mechanically, in a weak, uncertain voice, "Confession, confession!"

"Oh, you heretic dog! I will confess you with this," cried Stefanolo, the young fellow who had been so noisy before, and had since been one of the most vehement of the actors in this scene. And, as he spoke, he rushed up with a cudgel, which he was in the act of bringing down on the steward's head, when the shepherd, who happened to be near, seized his hand.

"What are you thinking of?" he said. "Are we to be worse than Turks? Let him be confessed, if he wishes."

"And who is there to confess him?" said the other.

"Who? If there is no one else, there's the friar who came to say mass; he's still in the church, but dares not come out."

"That fellow! He is an excommunicated heretic, and cannot confess."

"Let's find some one else then—his reverence" (meaning the parish priest).

"And how is one to find him, driven away as he has been by these rascals? And besides, we are still under the interdict, and no one can confess now—not even he."

"At the point of death it can be done, and he has confessed others; don't you remember Tona della Casetta, and Giorgio del Mulino?"

"Well, well; but these rogues are not at the point of death."

"Yes they are." "No, they aren't." Some declared on one side, and some on the other, and then the clamor was terrific. "Yes, they can be confessed." "No, they can't." After they had gone on for some time in this manner, a voice was heard which settled the question in a way that quieted the crowd. "As soon as they are confessed," it said, "we'll make an end of them; so that they may fairly be called at the point of death." "Yes, that's true; and now to find his reverence." "And where is he?" "Last night he slept at the boatman's." "Let's have the boatman." "Yes, Michael; where's Michael?" No one had seen him all that day. "I saw Michael going to Como with his son yesterday evening," said one of the crowd. "But he must have returned, for a little while ago I saw his boat turning the point of Bellagio," added another. "To the boatman's house, quick, quick!" cried many voices.

The boatman's hut was situated on the shore of the lake at the mouth of a little torrent called Auccio, about half-a-mile from Limonta toward Bellagio. The shepherd, who had undertaken to find the priest, met him on the road, in company with the two boatmen, father and son, and a third person, Lupo, the falconer's son, all just arrived from Como.

The vicar, a good old man, who carried his years lightly, was hastily ascending the steep mountain path in front of the others, when, turning a corner of the rock suddenly, he looked up and saw above him the man who was coming down to fetch him. He stopped abruptly, and called out, "Giammatteo, what is this great disturbance about, down at Limonta? One would think the world was coming to an end."

"Your reverence," panted the man, quite out of breath, "come as quickly as you can; no one but you can do anything; make haste, they have taken the palace of the monastery, and are playing the devil there; they want to murder the steward and his men; make haste, for God's sake!" and the priest hastened away.

Directly his brown cowl appeared at the square they all began to cry. "Here's his reverence!" and, hastening to meet him, they proposed to him, as a matter of course, to confess Pelagrua and his followers at once, because they wished to kill them. The good man had need of all the authority which his ministry gave him—of all the affection won by a long life spent for the good of his people, and of the fresh glory he had acquired from his persecutions—to dissuade these madmen from their desperate resolve.

What helped most to calm their boiling passions was the news that soon spread through the crowd that Lupo had come, ready to fight for his country against the champion of the monastery. The crowd immediately pressed round the falconer's son, who implored them to cease from shedding blood, to remain quiet, and to trust to him. Meanwhile the priest entered the steward's house and managed, after a while, to persuade those who had remained there to pillage to go quietly away. When he had settled matters in the outer court, he passed into the interior of the house, where, fancying he heard a faint cry from above, he went up a wooden staircase, till he came to a door on the landing. On looking through a crevice into the room, he saw, close to one of the side walls, a woman with disheveled hair, on the ground, holding a child tightly to her bosom, and striving to stop its cries with her hand. He recognized her at once as Pelagrua's wife, and knocked gently at the door, whispering at the same time, "I am the priest. Open the door, for all is quiet." The poor mother started so suddenly at the first sound that she removed her hand from the child's mouth, who uttered a sharp cry, which was stifled in a moment; but when the priest went on to say, "Do not be afraid, it is I, all is over!" she sprang up, and turning a large key, opened the door, and showed herself to her deliverer, with the infant in her arms.

"Oh! God has sent you!" said the poor creature, trembling all over. "He will reward you: not for my sake, but for the sake of my poor little angel," and so saying, she caught hold of the priest's clothes and kissed them and bathed them with tears in a deirium of joy and gratitude. "And my husband?" she asked anxiously.

"He is safe," said the priest, and went on: "It will not do for you to be seen about here; go out that way," pointing to a secret entrance, which opened on the left toward the mountain. "Take the path that leads to the castle, and beg the Count, in my name, to take you in for the night."

"Oh! but he will refuse, for"—

"Well, show yourself to Ermelinda, tell her—but there is no need to tell her anything. You want help, the Countess will welcome you eagerly, you may be sure. Go, in God's name."

The woman departed, and the vicar returned to the square, where the crowd still surrounded the falconer's son.

"Listen!" he called out. "We must take care that everything is done rightly and in proper form, so that we cannot be found fault with by the archbishop's official and by the lawyers, who have more quibbles and tricks at their fingers' ends than hairs on their heads. We must take your votes, and all assemble here to nominate as your champion this good fellow, whom God has sent to us."

Presently the sacristan of the parish came out on a platform in front of the church, and began to beat, with two little hammers, on a machine composed of a bronze plate, set in the middle of a square table, producing a sharp sound in a kind of cadence, alternately fast and slow. This was a summons to the scene of action. The people assembled, the question was put, and the votes were given. Lupo, as may be guessed, met with no opposition, and was proclaimed unanimously by the whole neighborhood the Champion of Limonta.

Owing to the interval that had already elapsed, and the new interests that occupied their minds, the first outburst of anger and desire for vengeance had subsided, and the multitude, new to bloodshed, began now to experience the reaction naturally resulting from their late proceedings. They now desired to leave the place, to withdraw from the sight of so many witnesses, and to conceal, in the tranquillity of their own homes, the part they had taken in an outbreak which they now clearly foresaw would recoil on the perpetrators. They slunk off quietly, like whipped curs, in different directions, and in a few minutes all was solitude and silence. But, notwithstanding this, Pelagrua would not trust himself to remain in the country, so he went down to the shore of the lake, and, finding a boat, entered it with a few of his followers, and as many of his household as had escaped from the massacre, without waiting to be rejoined by his wife and child, who he learned had taken refuge in the Count's castle. As he left the shore he looked back at Limonta, and cursed the place, swearing to return before long with the abbot's forces to take his revenge.

But the abbot, having heard from a messenger of the whole proceeding, flew into a rage with the steward himself, and finding he had gone to Varenna, sent him a most insulting letter, threatening to deprive him of his office, and saying he would make him rue his cowardice in allowing himself to be beaten by a handful of clowns, and driven from the district in so disgraceful a manner. As to the poor people of Limonta, I need not say that the abbot vowed summary vengeance upon them. But even the great cannot always do as they like. In those turbulent times the prelate had to keep his eyes and hands employed in different places at once, and could not bring together at a moment's notice the forces necessary for his purpose. He therefore pretended to do nothing, and let matters take their course, until he knew the issue of the pending trial at Bellano, which he felt sure, would render these mountaineers more helpless than before, and put them irrevocably in his power.

Lupo went at once to the castle of Count Oldrado, where he had been born, and where he expected an affectionate welcome, not only from his parents, but from all the inmates of the place. The news had already arrived of his appearance in Limonta, and of the efforts he had made to appease the furious riot that was going on there. Yet, no one went out to meet him, although many had wished to do so, because the Count, who, at the first rumor of the outbreak, had locked his gates and let down the portcullis, to guard against any attack, would not hear of anyone stirring out till all was quiet.

Admitted at last within the walls, the falconer's son was greeted by all in the castle with the utmost joy and delight. His father and mother embraced him over and over again, and on all sides questions were poured upon him as to his affairs; and countless blessings were showered upon him. Count Oldrado—though by no means displeased that the poor Limontese had found some one to take their part, and especially one who was clearly a match for the champion of the monastery—would, however, at any other time have restrained himself from evincing his delight, in order not to appear to disagree with the abbot, who was the stronger of the two; but just then the people of Limonta had also shown their teeth and were nearer to him than the abbot. His timid disposition, therefore, led him to make some demonstration in their favor, especially as at the entreaty of his wife and daughter he had given an asylum to Pelagrua's wife and child, and was now alarmed lest the mountaineers should take offence at this act of kindness. These reasons caused him to give our Lupo a most hearty welcome, and the caresses he showered on him quite astounded and confused the recipient.

Meanwhile, Ermelinda, the Count's wife, was sitting in a room on the ground floor reading the gospel of the day to her daughter Beatrice, and a young maiden who attended them, named Lauretta, the daughter of the falconer. It was her custom to do this every Sunday, now that, on account of the interdict, they could not attend service in the parish church. She read in Latin, which at that time was still understood throughout Italy.

They were sitting at a small table. Ermelinda was not more than forty years old; she was tall and stately, and of a majestic and pleasing expression. Her face was pale and colorless, and her eyes too often cast down, as if oppressed by some former sorrow which never had been shaken off.

Beatrice was the exact image of her mother, with the same beauty of feature, the same elegance in her form, the same expression in her face and eyes; but everything about her was set off by the fresh beauty of the springtide of life, and enhanced by a sense of happiness, and that mysterious essence which exhales from a soul as yet ignorant of the misfortunes of life, and, so to speak, hardly conscious of its own existence.

When the mother had finished reading, she shut the book, and said to the attendant, "Will you go and see whether that poor woman is in need of anything?"

Lauretta went out, and soon returned to say that she was provided with all that she required, and was now recovered from her great anxiety. She sent the Countess her thanks and blessing, and a request to be sent with her child to the place where her husband had taken refuge.

"You told her," said Ermelinda, "that I advise her for her own good to stay here till the evening, when I will have her escorted to Verenna?"

"I told her so," said the maiden, "and she soon acquiesced, and said that she would always pray the Lord to bless you and your house."

"May God have mercy on her!" said Ermelinda; "she was always a gentle and good woman;" and she repeated with a sigh, "The Lord have mercy on her!"

Here a knock was heard at the door, and the Count entered, leading the falconer's son, and presented him to his wife and daughter, saying: "Here is our good Lupo, who has come to defend the cause of Limonta."

Ermelinda and Beatrice received him with dignified but kindly courtesy; but Lauretta, as soon as she saw the long-desired face of her favorite brother, whom she had not seen for several years, could not control the first impulses of affection; so, running to meet him, she threw her arms around his neck, and held him tightly for a few minutes without speaking; then drawing back for an instant, she blushed deeply, and smiling, half with shyness, half with vexation, said in a trembling voice, "What a silly girl I am! I am delighted to see you, and yet I cannot help crying."

CHAPTER III

QUEEN OF LOVE AND BEAUTY

IT was the day appointed for the trial by battle. A company of Crivello's soldiers kept back the crowd with difficulty on the Piazza di San Giorgio at Bellano, round an open space in the center, whence came a mingled noise of saws, hammers, and the voices of workmen who were putting up the barricades.

On the left, looking down the square toward the lake, stood the archbishop's palace, a long edifice with pointed windows. On the right, and in front, were several thatched cottages, and in the rear was the church, then dedicated to St. George, with pointed arches in front and a large rose window full of tracery in the center, while between the window and the door was a stone statue representing the patron saint on horseback in the act of piercing with his lance the familiarly known dragon. On each side were two statues, one of St. Christopher, with the infant Jesus on his shoulder, the other of St. Anthony with a bell suspended to the top of a staff; both the work of great sculptors, who swarmed in Italy at that time.

The church door was wide open, and inside a swarm of armed retainers was surging to and fro, clad in all manner of garbs; waifs and strays assembled in frenzied haste by Cressone Crivello, who had summoned all the estates and castles in his possession to equip and send him forthwith all the men-at-arms that they were bound to furnish, according to the terms of feudal investiture. This extraordinary display of force had been made on account of the rumors that had reached him of the revolt of the people of Limonta; he fearing lest, besides these insurgents who had assembled to witness the trial by battle, the Bellano people might be inclined to give some trouble, suffering themselves also severely from the yoke imposed on them by the usurper.

In order to give an idea of what type of people these were, we will repeat a dialogue that took place in the church, between a chamois-hunter from Pagnona, a village on the high lands of Lignone, and a baker from Mandello, a large town on the shores of the lake, in the direction of Lecco. The hunter wore a leaden-colored doublet of mixed material, which came down nearly to his knees; a pair of tight-fitting trousers reaching to his ankles; his feet were cased in wooden shoes, fastened with string, the soles of which were shod with long iron spikes. A flask and a drinking-horn were slung over his shoulders, and he carried on his back an ashen bow with arrows tied to the string. The baker wore a jerkin of white cloth, with tight sleeves fastened at the wrists with brass buttons, a gaberdine trimmed with bearskin, a square cap on his head, and a rusty dagger by his side.

This latter personage was standing with one shoulder leaning against the holy-water basin, listening to the babble that was going on, when, seeing the hunter passing close to him, he laid his hand on his shoulder and said:

"Hello! friend Lorenzo, are you, too, at Bellano?"

"Certainly I am; why not? That animal, Crivello, won't let one be quiet a minute, bad luck to him!"

"For heaven's sake be quiet! don't you know that's language forbidden by statute? You'll be fined ten francs or else get a taste of the rope's end."

"Oh, tell the statutes to come after us to Legnone, and we'll settle that matter!"

"But how came you here?" asked the Mandello man, "you who have not a rood of land, nor a roof to your head. You are come as a substitute, I suppose?"

"Yes, for our parish priest; he holds his living on condition of paying tithes, and of serving in the archbishop's guard four days a year; but now that the archbishop is gone, there is not a soul in the country who can endure the notion of going to serve those excommunicated scoundrels. Crivello swears that he will take the priest's glebe away, and worse than that; so the poor wretch has to dodge about in order to comply with the summons; now paying one man as a substitute, now another. This time he has tried it with me, and as there are no chamois left, and still fewer bears, what had I to do at home? So I said to myself, 'Let's go and have a look at this fighting-match, the like of which has not been seen this many a year;' and so here I am."

"I am here on my own account," said the baker. "You know I hold that little house of mine at a quit-rent of four days' armed service a year. Please God this is the last of them, and my papers will prove that; and if this fine master of ours means to go on as he did all last year, and oblige us to be under arms forever, I don't mean to stand it. Everyone at Mandello declares they won't bear it any more, and there will be some trouble, as there has been at Limonta."

"It's true then, is it, that the people of Limonta have been up in arms?"

"Indeed they have; they have murdered Pelagrua, and set the monastery buildings on fire."

"Well done, indeed!" exclaimed the hunter.

"Yes; but now they say that the Abbot of San Ambrogio is as furious as a Turk and swears by all the saints that he will pay them out handsomely."

"There's many a slip between the cup and the lip; the matter has to be settled here before the regular tribunals. If the Limontese champion gets the best of it, I should like to see any one meddle with him. You would have the whole of the Lake of Como in revolt."

"You are very young, friend Lorenzo," interrupted the baker. "You don't yet know that reason is always on the side of counts and lords, and that rags and tatters go to the wall."

"But here, you see, we are all of one mind," urged the hunter.

"All of one mind! What a ridiculous idea! Do you see those forty lancers up in the square? Who do you think could touch them? They are all armed so that you could make no more impression on them than on a stone; and a resolute set they are, and ready to run all risks for anyone who will pay them, if it were the devil himself."

"But what would you say about us?"

del

"Why, here we all are, a useless crowd, of no more account than a lot of scarecrows, and they keep us shut up in church, as you see, for fear we should go roaming about, making common cause with the Bellano folk; but if we got the chance to deal with these fellows, do you suppose we should not do our part as well?"

"Certainly we should," answered the mountaineer.

"Bravo!" rejoined the baker, smiling. "I told you you were a young greenhorn; and what's more, if to-day the Mandello people, for instance, were to keep the Bellano folk to their bargain, to-morrow, so to speak, Bellano would come to Mandello, and do the same to us."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the approach of one of Crivello's forty lancers, who was pacing up and down amongst the rustic soldiery to keep them in order.

Meanwhile, in the great hall of the archbishop's palace knights, and castellanes, lords, ladies and high-born damsels were assembling from the castles and fortified places around the lake, vying with each other in the beauty and magnificence of their dress and appointments, and in the number and splendor of their respective retainers.

A long room, opening into the hall, was swarming with pages, valets, and squires, while the vast court re-echoed the tramping of horses, the baying of hounds, and the shouting of the retainers.

Together with the cavaliers and noble ladies, the respective advocates of the monastery of San Ambrogio and Limonta passed into the privileged hall. Each was habited in a long robe of violet silk, with a red hood lined with ermine, the point reaching to the heels. But the Limontese advocate did not, like his opponent, hold in his hand the silver mace, an honor reserved especially for those who defended the rights of hospitals, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical bodies.

With the advocate of Limonta walked Ottorino Visconti, Lupo's master, who had promised the squire to come to Bellano on the day of the trial. He was a graceful knight, about twenty-six years old, and was the son of Uberto Visconti, the brother of Magno Matteo, and cousin of Galeazzo I, who had died the year before our story begins. Ottorino was, therefore, also the cousin of Marco, Luchino, and Giovanni, the other three surviving brothers, all sons of Matteo.

Ot
Vi

The noble boy was hardly old enough to wear a cuirass when he placed himself under the command of his cousin Marco, then a man in the prime of life, and celebrated as one of the boldest soldiers in Italy. He had practised the military calling under the eyes of that great captain, by whom he was loved as a son, received at his hands the military belt, and eagerly followed his banner.

Our hero was richly dressed in crimson velvet, with an azure mantle, embroidered in silver and lined with sable; a large gold chain went twice round his neck and fell on his chest. From under a hat of the same color as his mantle escaped, in graceful ringlets, a mass of black locks flowing over his shoulders; and a white feather on his hat formed a striking contrast with the color of his hair. His bright eyes shone with a tempered fire, his face was slightly sunburned; he was tall, with well-proportioned limbs, resolute and haughty in every gesture and movement.

Lorenzo Garbagnate, the advocate of Limonta, was relating to him the late events at that place, and the honorable part his squire Lupo had taken in them, and the story made the young knight's heart glow with pleasure.

The conversation then turning on Count Oldrado and his family, Ottorino asked after Beatrice, whom he had known as a child at her father's castle, and the advocate told him what a beautiful creature she had become in recent years.

"And is it true that she is like her mother?" asked the youth.

"As like as two drops of water; but you will see her to-day, as I hear her father is to bring her to see the duel."

"And at what hour will the trial begin?"

"Six hours after sunrise, unless some fresh difficulties arise."

"What difficulties can arise? Is not everything arranged?"

"Yes, but this interdict complicates everything. Crivello's deputy has arrested the parish priest for refusing to bless the arms. The priest protests he would rather suffer martyrdom than incur excommunication, and as his persecutor is equally obstinate the affair threatens to be serious."

"But can't they find some other priest?"

"Who would take this burden on himself? The Vicar of Limonto was here just now with Lupo, but when he heard the turn things were taking, he slipped away through the crowd."

"What is this new disturbance?" said Ottorino, turning to look at the company, who were crowding from all parts of the hall round a man in the center, who had just arrived.

"It must be some minstrel," said Garbagnate, and so it turned out to be. The man wore a fantastic dress, with two rows of silver bells on his doublet, hose, and mantle, and a funnel-shaped hat on his head, also surrounded with bells. He carried a lute on his shoulders, and as he began to touch the chords he accompanied the sounds with the most ridiculous antics, which caused great merriment.

"Tremacoldo, Tremacoldo!" exclaimed the knights and ladies. He was a famous minstrel, well known at fairs and tourneys, as well as at the courts of every prince in Italy, and, in short, wherever people were assembled. He knew a thousand tricks and jests; he had at his fingers' ends all sorts of fantastic games; he told the newest jokes, the finest stories, and sang the poetry of the most celebrated troubadours of that day.

But suddenly his expectant audience left him on the appearance of a new attraction. Beatrice, the Count del Balzo's daughter, entered the hall at that moment, holding her father's hand. While Ottorino embraced his former host, and bowed with chivalrous courtesy to the young lady, Tremacoldo, irritated against the new arrivals, who had scattered his admirers, came forward angrily to throw at them some sharp word; for in those times minstrels and buffoons were privileged people, to whom every kind of liberty of speech and action was accorded.

But when Tremacoldo saw Beatrice in all her beauty he was appeased at once, and turning the affair into a compliment to her, without, however. sparing his unappreciative audience, he said:

"It is quite right that owls should be silent when the sun appears; but that, instead of hiding themselves, they should fly to meet its beams, is a thing I have never seen before."

This maiden at sixteen was like a rose opening in all its freshness and fragrance to the first rays of a lovely dewy morning. A long blue robe, confined at the waist by a silver chain which fell to her knees, repeated the color of her eyes, but was far from rivaling the ethereal azure, the soft and languid brightness of those orbs. Her fair hair, soft and shining as spun gold, covered only by a wreath of flowers, alternately of white and blue, fell in a shower, waving over her neck and shoulders rich and fragrant, down to the border of her flowing robe.

There was much natural sweetness and candor in her face, but there was also a slight shade of self-will, a faint tinge of fastidious coyness, which, blended with soft pride, added a certain charm and fascination to the nobility of her countenance.

This vision of beauty advanced to the middle of the hall, having on one side her father, on the other Ottorino; and a low murmur of admiration accompanied her. She saw all faces turned toward her; she partly heard, and partly guessed, the words used by the crowd, and lowering her eyelids timidly, blushed deeply. The minstrel, bending one knee before her, and raising his hat, proclaimed her in a loud voice Queen of Love and Beauty! The girl, frightened and confused, and feeling overpowered with shyness, pressed close to her father, and implored him by signs that he would take her away—that he would silence that dreadful man. But the Count del Balzo, who was reveling in his daughter's triumph, made her take her seat at the higher end of the hall, sat down at her right hand, and motioned to Ottorino to place himself on the other side, and after he had responded politely to the kind reception given him by the company assembled, he turned with lordly condescension to the minstrel, and, excusing himself for having interrupted him by his arrival, begged him to continue.

"I will begin again," said Tremacoldo; and, raising his head, he began to sing the praises of Beatrice. After comparing the girl to the lily-of-the-valley, to the rose of Jericho, to the cedar of Lebanon—after placing her above all the beautiful sultanas, the ornaments of the harems of Egypt and Persia, and the noble dames and princesses the most praised in the songs of the provincial troubadours—he likened her to Madonna Laura, for whom the verses of Petrarch were then preparing a fame which, after five centuries, is still green and flourishing; and promised to the Como beauty some songs from the poet of the Lady of Avignon, who, although he was not then more than twenty-five years old, was already celebrated through all Italy as the first of poets. Finally, turning toward the young knight who sat beside the maiden, he praised his race, his manners, his courage, and concluded by saying that the damsel suited him as a gem would a ring.

The minstrel was often interrupted by signs of an admiration so passionate that it could not be controlled, but must find vent in applause.

Ottorino sprang to his feet, and, taking from his neck the chain he wore, he presented it with a chivalrous gesture to the singer, who, after returning thanks for the gift, twisted the chain round his hat, gave a leap in the air, and began again to play his lute.

In the meantime, Count Oldrado, catching sight of Garbagnate at the other end of the hall, said to his daughter, "I will return in a moment," and ran toward the advocate, to ask him the hour when the trial would begin. But the girl, who found herself alone, with all eyes fixed on her, rose timidly from her seat, and approached a window looking on the Piazza, where she hoped to recover herself in some degree. She was also encouraged by being soon joined by Ottorino, who, among so many strangers, as the friend of her father, became at that trying moment a support and a kind guardian.

To make matters better, the crowd so much dreaded by the damsel had returned to listen to Tremacoldo, who was beginning another song; so by degrees she felt her tremors vanish. But though her fright was disappearing, another sensation rose within her—a sensation of true modesty, a kind of terror at finding herself, for the first time, thus in company with a man who was not her father; so turning frequently in the direction of the Count, who was walking about the hall with Garbagnate, she beckoned to him to return to her; but he, deep in discussion, with his head full of church law, and popes, and decretals, only signed to her with his hand that he was coming, and came none the more for that.

Meantime, Ottorino began speaking to the maiden with courteous ease of the time they had passed together at the Castle of Limonta, when she was still a child. He reminded her of her games, her studies, her pleasures, and the small passions and trials of her childhood—that time when everything appears bright to those who look back upon it. Beatrice began to feel reassured in the society of the young knight; and the terror she had felt at first was lost in the agreeable conversation.

As to the youth, a secret feeling of pride made the society he was in extremely agreeable to him. Everyone had admired the maiden; the most distinguished young nobles of the country had coveted a word or a look from her; and he was the only one whom she was willing to have near her, and to whom she spoke with confiding ease, as to a friend.

Thus at the first meeting of Ottorino and Beatrice, after a long term of years, the sense of support she found in his presence, and the charm he found in her, contributed largely to increase the early affection they had felt for each other, and to create in their hearts the germ of another sort of love, which took the place of the former feeling.

A trumpet gave warning that the ordeal was about to begin. The minstrel ceased his song, and his audience hastened to take their places in the balconies. Count Balzo joined his daughter, who remained standing between Ottorino and her father.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL OF SINGLE COMBAT

AT the extreme corner of the façade of the archbishop's palace, looking toward the mountain, projected a platform where the judges sat to pronounce sentence. The eyes of all were turned to this point, and fixed on the three persons that occupied this important position.

"Who are they?" asked Beatrice of her father.

"The judge is sitting in the middle," answered the Count; "of the other two standing up, the one on his right with the silver mace is the advocate of the monastery; the other you know—Garbagnate, the advocate of Limonta."

The trumpet sounded again to enforce silence; and then the advocate of the monastery, turning to the judge, said: "Do you admit that you sit as deputy of the illustrious and magnificent noble, Cressone Crivello, in order to decide the strife between the monastery of San Ambrogio and the men of Limonta?" To which the judge replied solemnly, "I admit it." Then the first speaker continued: "I protest before you that the men of Limonta are serfs of the monastery of San Ambrogio." Garbagnate answered: "And I oppose the prescriptive right of a century to the claim of the plaintiff." The judge then gave sentence as follows: "Both sides have offered to produce witnesses ready to testify to the truth of their assertions; but not being willing to give opportunity for perjury, we, by virtue of the archiepiscopal and royal authority committed to us, have decreed that the contending parties shall have recourse to the

ture
dis-

judgment of God, by means of the duel with clubs and shields." Turning then to the advocate of the plaintiff: "Do you acknowledge Ramengo da Cassale as the champion of the monastery of San Ambrogio?" The advocate replied: "I do acknowledge it." "And you," he asked Garbagnate; "do you acknowledge Lupo of Limonta as the champion of his countrymen, the Limontese?" "I acknowledge it," Garbagnate answered.

"Now observe," said Count Oldrado to his daughter.

Each of the advocates took a large, knotty cudgel, and, coming before the judgment seat, exchanged weapons as a sign of mutual acceptance of the challenge.

The champions now came forward on the platform, and were received with loud applause; and swore in turn that they came to that ordeal not trusting to any charms or enchantments but to the sole help of God, of the Virgin, and of that valiant knight, the noble Saint George. After this they took their position within the lists.

While they were coming down the staircase inside the palace, the crowd in the square kept surging to and fro: those behind pressing forward to get a better view, while those in front tried to push them back.

"If it were not for the interdict," said the Count to Ottorino, "now would be the time to say mass, which the two champions ought to hear kneeling on the steps of the altar, and the shields and cudgels should be formally blessed. I know all about it, for I have at my fingers' ends the customs of the State of Milan, codified by order of the Mayor Brunagio Porca. Now I wish to see how they will get out of it, for without blessing the arms there can be no trial by the ordeal of God."

"I am told," answered the youthful knight, "that the parish priest will not bless them on any account."

"He is quite right; the Church law is clear on that point; he would incur excommunication were he to do so."

"Well, they must settle it as best they may," replied Ottorino. "I understand nothing about it."

The two champions now appeared in the square, accompanied by the judge, two attendants, and a trumpeter; while seven or eight lancers opened for them a passage through the crowd. The judge, taking from the hand of an attendant a shield and a cudgel, gave them to Ramengo, addressing him with these formal words: "Receive the shield and the club for the attack, for the maintenance of justice." Then presenting similar weapons to Lupo, he said: "Receive this shield and club of defense, for the maintenance of justice." The judge went off to take his seat on a dais, accompanied by two notaries, and the witnesses and the assistants took their places.

The champions now took up their respective stations, opposite to each other, at the extremities of the lists. They were dressed in leggings of chamois leather fastened around their waists, which reached to their feet, and ended in a pair of red sandals; all the rest of the body was bare. On the left arm they bore a wooden target squared at each end, slightly curved on the inner side, and covered with parchment: and in the right hand a large and knotty oaken cudgel.

Ramengo da Casale appeared to be about thirty-five years of age; he was thick-set, strong-limbed, wide-chested, and broad-shouldered; he had a bull neck, short, brawny arms, and shaggy red hair.

Lupo had better-proportioned limbs, was taller by half a head, handsomer and more agile than his opponent, but he was far from exhibiting the herculean strength of the other.

All eyes were fixed on the two champions, and it might easily be seen that the general feeling was in favor of Lupo, partly because of the justice of his cause, and partly because the first sight of his pleasing exterior and frank countenance roused universal sympathy.

The Limontese youth, who was placed with his back to the church, turned to look at the archbishop's palace, and seeing the Count, Ottorino and Beatrice, he saluted them with a slight inclination of his head, then lowering his eyes, turned them for an instant on his father, who was standing behind him.

The trumpet gave the last signal, and the two champions advanced toward each other with measured and cautious step, covering their heads with the shields, and skilfully whirling the sticks round their heads.

When they had arrived in the center of the lists, and were almost within reach of each other, Ramengo planted his brawny legs firmly on the ground, and resting somewhat obliquely on his right thigh, stood ready to meet the attack.

Lupo began circling round him and trying to draw him on by repeated feints, but his experienced adversary, whose plan of the battle was to allow the first fire of the raw and eager boy (as he considered him) to be used up, contented himself with keeping his front turned toward his adversary, and in so doing kept a circle, of which his right foot marked the circumferance and his left remained as the axis. And so this valiant duelist continued, quietly parrying all his opponent's blows with admirable science and peculiar skill. Once, however, when Lupo, in making a thrust, left one side exposed, he seized the opportunity, and dealt him such a back stroke as would have broken the youth's ribs, if he had not been as quick as lightning in springing out of the way. The cudgel grazed his skin, and turned off harmlessly with a whizz that found an echo in the heart of poor Ambrose, who turned as pale as death.

Those among the crowd who sided with Lupo thought matters began to look serious, and became somewhat apprehensive for their favorite. But he, stimulated by his own danger, and burning with shame, returned to the charge with such impetuosity that Ramengo was forced to beat a retreat, and in defending himself was not able to maintain the same calm superiority as before. The storm of blows was too rapid, and the fury with which the young henchman fell upon him was too overwhelming. The champion of the monastery was, however, skilful enough to profit by a false move on his adversary's part, and contrived to deal a blow which broke the shield in half. Lupo felt his hand stiffen, and became aware of what damage had been done by seeing the broken target entangled on his arm. He opened his fist, threw off the straps, and casting on the ground the useless instrument of defence, seized the cudgel in desperation with both hands, raised it on high above his head, and with all the strength he could muster aimed a fearful blow at the head of his opponent. Ramengo was in perfect readiness to protect with his shield the threatened part; but the solid mass came down so furiously and with such power that the shield itself was knocked down on his skull, and he was stunned. He felt a buzzing in his ears, his eyes swam, his knees gave way under him, he tottered for a moment, and then fell down senseless to the ground, as if dead. But whether it was from a natural instinct to defend his face, or a movement made by chance, he lowered first his left elbow, and then sank down on it, so that his head rested on the target and did not touch the arena.

At this moment a cry like a clap of thunder broke forth, and Lupo's father was quite beside himself at the burst of applause showered on his son.

"Long live Lupo! long live the falconer's son! Hurrah for the Limontese!" exclaimed the multitude.

But the advocate Garbagnate, who, before the fight had begun, had reëntered the grand hall, asked Ottorino at this juncture whether he thought Ramengo was dead. "Dead! not a bit of it," he replied. "It is true that blood is flowing from his nose and ears, but that is nothing. He is only stunned."

"Then we must tell Lupo to place his head on the bare ground, or else they will get out of it by some quibble, and say that it was a drawn battle. It must be remembered that our statutes do not recognize a man as conqueror in this kind of ordeal unless he makes his adversary's head touch the ground, or drives him out of the lists."

The Count del Balzo heard Garbagnate give this information, and partly because he wished the Limontese to benefit by the victory gained by their champion, and partly from the mania he always had of passing for a very knowing fellow, he called out to Lupo to do as Garbagnate suggested. But hardly had the congratulations of the bystanders ceased to sound in his ear, when he perceived that he had made a great blunder, by having been led into an action that might compromise him with the abbot. He began, therefore, bitterly to repent of having done so, and atoned for his petty vanity by a well-founded apprehension of the consequences.

Lupo, before the combat, had been instructed privately by Garbagnate as to what he should have to do in order to acquit himself with honor; but not being accustomed to the snares and quibbles of lawyers, he had thought, when he saw Ramengo stretched on the ground, that there could be no further difficulty, and so, when he heard the Count advise him to make his head touch the ground, he said to himself, "But here he is lying as stiff as a corpse. What can they want more?" The idea then came into his mind, in order to set all doubts at rest, to put his adversary outside the arena; so bending over him to see whether he could detect any signs of life, he seized him round the waist, hoisted him on his shoulders, and ran round the lists with him. Then, stopping near the barrier, and beckoning to those about to retire a little, with one great effort he flung the wretched man like a sack of grain over the palisade, and sent him spinning among the soldiers and spectators.

The crowd, after clapping their hands, and crying out, "Hurrah for Limonta! Hurrah for Lupo!" began now to separate, and disperse to their several homes through the nearest streets.

Meantime the gentry gathered again round Tremacoldo. After pressing entreaties, he resumed the rondinella, which had been interrupted by the arrival of Count del Balzo, a song which was the fashion at that time on the Lake of Como, and was said to have been composed by a princess who had been confined in the Castle of Rezzonico to die of starvation, on account of the brutal jealousy of her husband.

When the lay was finished, the Count del Balzo went away with Beatrice, who was much affected by it; most of the knights and ladies followed their example.

CHAPTER V

A FATAL STORM

THE people who had gathered at Bellano from all the lake districts were now on their way to their own homes. On the shore, within the harbor, there was a great uproar going on—talking and shouts, and a rattling of chains, which were being unfastened from the rings to loosen the boats, and questioning, and answers, and an exchange of news and greetings. In a very short time the lake was covered with barks of every description, which, according to their several destinations, either hoisted their sails to prepare for a strong wind, which had set in a short time before, or else put all their strength into rowing against the waves.

The Limonta party was the last to start: there were six barks, and wishing to keep together, they were waiting till Lupo was released from the hands of the deputy and the advocates, who had kept him back to go through some formalities.

The Count del Balzo, in the most courteous manner possible, had insisted on Ottorino returning with him to the castle to spend a few days, so they entered a vessel together, and took their seats in one of those miniature houses, prettily ornamented and furnished with every comfort, which were placed at that time, and are even so to this day, in the center of the boats belonging to grandees. Beatrice sat down opposite her father, and the priest of Limonta was invited by the Count to take his place opposite the young knight.

There were two oars in the stern and two in the bow.

Michael, as the eldest, took charge of the helm. His son, Arigozzo, was on the front bench, the place usually given to the strongest and most skilful oarsman.

Our Lupo, after receiving with a certain unpolished modesty the congratulations showered on him by the nobles, came out on the prow and placed himself astride on the point of the vessel, with his legs dangling on either side, amusing himself with dipping his feet in the water at every pitch of the boat, and feeling his face sprinkled with the spray of the oars.

Ambrose, his father, was sitting in the bottom of the boat, thinking of his own happiness in possessing such a son, whom, in his opinion, every gentleman would be proud to have for his own. From time to time he approached him, and whispered a few tender words to him, to which demonstrations Lupo responded by a glance or smile.

When they were at the point of Morcate, Arigozzo, seeing a small, bright cloud over Val Menaggio, said, "We shall have a storm. Make haste, my brave boys; pull a few strong strokes, that we may get to Varenna before it comes upon us!"

In the covered part of the boat, the father of Beatrice turned the conversation upon Marco Visconti, and related to his young guest something that he already partly knew, which the old Count was in the habit of telling everyone, namely, how he had been at school with that famous captain. "We studied together," said he, "the trivio and the quarivio, and later Law and Equity—and Marco was one of the ablest scholars—and, to tell you the truth, there was only one other that could at all equal him"—and here he gave a little smile of mock modesty, and showed clearly who was the one he did not name. But fearing that perhaps Ottorino would not have acumen enough to interpret his reticence, "We were always rivals," he continued, "and I remember the dispute we had together when the book called *De Monarchia,* by Dante Alighieri, came out—a poisonous book, afterward burned, as it deserved, by the common hangman—and Marco, who was mad about the Ghibelline faction, would defend it tooth and nail. I can tell you we made noise enough about it, but yet remained always good friends."

"Yes, I know that, for he has often spoken of you to me in former times," answered Ottorino.

"Do you mean that?" asked the Count, anxiously; "and what did he say?"

"Knowing that I was so intimate with your poor Lionel, he asked me all about you and the Countess, whom he praised to the skies."

Count Oldrado in a low voice whispered in the knight's ear, so as not to be heard by his daughter; but he spoke so loud that Beatrice, though not appearing or intending to listen, did not lose a syllable of his discourse.

"You must know," he said, "that Ermelinda was at one time to have been Marco's wife, but strange events happened. I will tell you about it at a more convenient season; there was much ill blood over it, and they even came to blows, my wife's father having been slain by Marco at the ford of the Adda."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a sudden clap of thunder. A second later the steersman was heard crying: "The storm is upon us; all hands to work!"

There was a short silence, during which could be heard the distant roar of the storm over the lake. The first ominous dash of the white-crested waves was heard on the shore, a sure harbinger of the coming storm. The Count, approaching the door near the stern, called out: "Michael, why did you not bear up for the shore at the first sign of bad weather? Now we shall be driven among those atrocious rocks, where there is no landing!"

"It has come as suddenly as if the devil had brought it," replied the boatman. "Courage, men!" he cried out. "On, my brave boys—now close all together!"

The men set to work with a will, and plied their oars so vigorously that the timbers of the boat cracked at each stroke. But now they began to feel the squall, the first waves struck the vessel, which no longer preserved its equilibrium, but pitched and tossed in all directions.

In spite of it all, the vessel continued to make way by degrees, and was fast approaching the point of Varenna.

They were already abreast of the promontory, and were about to double it, when a sudden gust struck the stern of the boat, and a sound as of splitting wood was heard, followed by appalling shouts: "The rudder is gone. We are lost! Belay that awning! Holy Virgin! Rig an oar in the steerage! Quick, tie it down! Lord have mercy upon us! Help, help!"

Everything in the boat was in a state of wild confusion, amid these loud cries of anguish and despair, which were, however, almost drowned by the whistling of the wind, the roar of the breakers, and the terrible detonations of the thunder, echoing from the cliffs and caverns of the mountains overhead.

The priest clasped his hands in prayer, administered to them all absolution *in articulo mortis*, and then fell on his knees in a corner of the little cabin; while the Count, with stony eyes and open mouth, stared wildly at his daughter, who was clinging to him, and cried out every moment, "Lord help me!"

Ottorino had rushed out of the cabin, to render what help he could; but he soon saw that the vessel, which was now entirely at the mercy of the winds and waves, was in imminent peril of shipwreck on the cliffs of Morcate, in spite of the almost superhuman exertions of the rowers. Just as he came out, Arigozzo, who had thrown the whole weight of his body on his oar, suddenly missed his stroke, and losing his balance from the non-resistance of the water, fell into the lake. He struggled a moment or two with the billows, when the boat passed over him, and he appeared no more.

"Make for the mountain!" cried the steersman in despair, who, owing to his view being obstructed by the cabin amidships, was ignorant of the loss of his son.

A few more mingled prayers and curses were still heard, but directly afterward all sounds were lost in one general inarticulate shriek, as the boat was violently driven by a huge wave upon a mass of perpendicular rock.

At this crisis Ottorino did not lose his presence of mind, but fixing his eye on a small rock close at hand, he gathered himself up for a leap, and sprang on it, holding the chain of the boat in one hand; but the retreating wave forced back the vessel, and would have dragged him also from his vantage ground, had he not clung tightly to the rock on which he was. The next wave sent the boat back again to the rock, and Ottorino this time managed to grasp the taffrail. Lupo, the falconer, and the other boatmen, who were standing ready at the prow, at once leaped out, and luckily contrived to pass the chain round a wild fig-tree, growing in a crevice. The vessel, thus fastened against the cliffs with the bows high out of the water, like a bull taken in a lasso, appeared to kick and struggle against the repeated assaults of the billows.

Ottorino and the rest of the party, after they had seen Count Balzo and his daughter safe out of the boat, began searching all over the mass of rocks for traces of the man who had gone overboard, but without much hope of success. His father alone, who had been the last to leave the boat, and in the confusion had not perceived that his son was missing, sat down at the foot of the rock, with a piece of broken oar on his knee, and began to look for him among the others, but without much uneasiness, as he felt sure that everyone was safe.

Just then the Count, relieved from his past alarm, and much annoyed by the perils he had gone through, began to upbraid the steersman and his son Arigozzo, whose fate he also was far from suspecting. Michael received these approaches with downcast eyes, and the general air of a man conscious of having deserved them; but on hearing his son's name (his most sensitive point), coupled with his own, he could not restrain himself from answering in some measure. But suddenly turning toward the lake, his eye was caught by something strange, apparently entangled in the clefts of a rock close by, and almost hidden by the waves. On looking more closely he distinguished the corner of a brown gabardine, and then a hand that now and again appeared above the waves.

The poor father felt ready to drop; seizing his broken oar, he leapt to his feet, and cried out in an agonized voice, "Arigozzo, Arigozzzo!" There being no reply, he rushed up the rock, and looked round among the men, but his son was not there. His eyes now fell on the Count, who had just before insulted that much loved name. "You are there, are you, you dog?" he roared out, and brandishing the broken oar, he darted forward to strike at him.

On hearing Beatrice's shriek, Ottorino stepped forward and parried the blow, and the next moment Lupo and the rest rushed up and disarmed the frenzied man, who struck his brow with his clenched fist, and sprang into the lake.

Here he could be seen struggling with the infuriated waves, with the ardor and strength of despair. In a few strokes he reached the body, and groping in the water, caught it firmly by the hair; but overcome by a thrill of paternal affection, he felt that this was too rough a mode of handling the beloved form. So he placed his left hand under the chin, so as to support the head, while with his right he paddled through the water toward the rock he had just quitted. The boatmen came up in their vessel, now almost in a sinking condition, and threw the old man the ropes of the sail, by grasping which he managed to get safely to land with his melancholy and precious burden.

He then laid out his son's body on the rock, with the head on his own knees, and, bending over it, examined the chest to see whether the heart still beat; then pressing his own breast and cheeks against those of his son, he covered his eyes, mouth, and face with kisses, breathing upon him as if hoping to restore him to life. A sudden gust of wind slightly moved the arm of the corpse, which was hanging down, and made it stir a little. At this the poor father was seized with a sudden thrill of hope; the blood rushed to his cheeks for an instant; his features seemed relieved, and a sudden gleam of light flashed from his eyes, which he kept intently fixed on the beloved countenance; but, at last, realizing the deception, he clutched his hair with both hands, and then stretched out his fists towards the lake: "Oh, ye accursed wind and waves!" he cried, "and thou thrice cursed bark, and the hour I first put foot into thee! Perdition take ye all!" All the rest stood round gazing at him, like men bereft of their senses; none dared offer him a word of consolation. But the priest, after leaving him a short time to his grief, came near him, and instead of addressing his words to Michael himself, he placed one hand on the head of his son, which was still on the father's knee, and said, with a feeling voice: "My poor Arigozzo! thou wert ever a good, God-fearing son, and fond of thy parents!"

"That is true!" answered the father, deeply affected by the praise given to his loved one. "I did not deserve so good a son."

"In these times when one's faith is in such peril," continued the priest, "how dost thou know, my poor Michael, that the Lord may not have called him in mercy, while he was still His? Come, think that thou art restoring him to Him who gave him to thee, and who has taken him away, for ends we cannot know, but which are, without doubt, ordained in justice and compassion for His elect?"

"Oh, but what can I do without him?" exclaimed the boatman. "What shall I reply to my poor Martha when I get home, and she asks me, 'What hast thou done with our son?' "

"The Lord will not forsake you," gently urged the good priest. "He who has sent the affliction will give you strength to bear it."

Michael raised his eyes to heaven, and exclaimed: "Why am not I dead? Why leave me here, a useless old man, and take him away in the first bloom of youth—our only hope, support, and consolation?" but he could not go on.

Meantime, the others who had been saved were discussing how best to get away from that naked rock before nightfall. Although the point upon which they had struck was at a little distance from the mountain, and appeared to have been separated from it for many ages, it was not very difficult to reach the foot of the mountain by leaping from one to another of the smaller rocks that showed above the waves. But even when the mountain was reached, it rose to an incalculable height, as steep as a wall.

They waited here awhile, scanning the neighboring heights to see if they could find some shepherd passing near them in search of a stray lamb or kid, so that they might inform him of their extremity by signs, and ask his assistance; but not a living soul could be seen. As to making their voices heard in that vast solitude, beneath that illimitable sky and amid the noise of the waves, that was evidently hopeless.

At last Lupo said to his companions, "We must resolve to act while the daylight lasts. I will try to get up there"—pointing with his finger to a peak a little to the right—"and once there I shall easily contrive to drop down to Varenna, and return here in a boat."

The falconer would not hear of his running so tremendous a risk. "Stay here with us," he said. "We must take our chances alike." Ottorino, too, tried to dissuade him from the enterprise, which seemed the height of rashness; but he replied, "I have often followed the chase as a youth, and I can fairly say that there is not a precipice from Codano to Legnone that I do not know, so let me try my luck, and, with God's help, I hope to succeed." He then took off his sandals, laid down the short cloak which he wore, and, clad in a tight jerkin made of thin leather, at once set to work.

He reached the foot of the mountain without much difficulty, and stopping for a moment at the last rock that stood against it, looked up at the tremendous height he had to surmount. At last, he crossed himself, and began to ascend slowly and circumspectly, clambering from cliff to cliff, and from precipice to precipice. If he came across a bramble, a sapling, or a young oak, or a thin stem of wild fig, he clutched it with his hands, and supported his feet against it, and so got higher and higher.

The people on the rocks below followed his movements with their eyes, trembling at every uncertain step or slip that he made.

By good luck, however, the climber lighted upon a cavity where he could rest and take breath for a moment; thence he cast down his eyes to judge of the distance he had already traversed, but soon drew them back, quite dazed and giddy, owing to the tremendous height; but in a few minutes he crossed himself again, and started afresh.

The lookers-on lost sight of him for a moment, and then, discerning something rolling down from the top of the precipice, they gave up all for lost; but they soon saw that it was only a mass of rock, bounding from peak to peak, till it fell into the lake broken into a thousand fragments. The daring traveler once more turned round, looking like a brown, dim speck, and then disappeared.

Ottorino then asked one of the boatmen if any vessel could live in such a sea.

"That's as it may be," was the reply. "It would take a bold man to launch out three hands'-breadths from the shore at this moment; but the wind must go down at sunset, and by the time Lupo arrives at Varenna the waves may go down as well."

The young knight said no more, but sat down on the rock by the side of Beatrice. All kept their eyes fixed on the mountains of Tremazzo, behind which the sun had just gone down. Gigantic clouds, hurried on by the wind, seemed to be whirled and twisted about and changed into a thousand fantastic forms, tinged with a fiery red.

In the immediate vicinity of the sunset the sky was still red, but if you cast your eyes from the highest peaks down the mountain slopes to the verge of the lake, neither trees nor houses could be distinguished. All was quiet above; but from below, above the roaring of the waves and the wind, might be heard the low, monotonous and continued wail of poor Michael repeating his rosary over the body of his son.

Ottorino had taken the hand of Beatrice, which in her fright and bewilderment she had abandoned to him, quite thankful to feel herself near a protector; for, as her father was sitting crouched up on the other side of the rock, with his head between his knees and his teeth chattering with cold and terror, she could not trust much to him. The long hair of the girl floating in the wind was carried for an instant against the young man's face, who, shipwrecked as he was, even in that place and amidst that scene of terror, would not have exchanged that moment for a whole life of prosperity.

After about an hour, a light was seen toward the point of Varenna, which they had been unable to weather; and they set up a cry of joy, which was responded to by other shouts, half drowned by the wind. The shipwrecked people continued shouting, which served as a guide for the rescuing vessel to steer for, in its troublous course. Already for some time, over and above the noise of the waves, an intermittent noise as of oars had been heard, which increased as it came nearer, and then the sound of voices in conversation, and at last the vessel itself appeared. The Count's two boatmen ran down to lend a hand in preventing the boat from striking against the rock, with whose assistance Lupo, who was with the newcomers, managed to fix outside the bows a large platform, to serve as a bridge between the vessel and the rock.

The first to sally forth, as soon as he saw it firmly fixed, was Count Oldrado; he jumped into the vessel, and turning round to call his daughter, soon had the satisfaction of seeing her by his side, as Ottorino had taken her arm and assisted her to cross. At last they all got on board; the last was the old pilot, who laid his son's corpse under the covered part of the stern, and prepared to lie down beside it. After a while Lupo, seeing that he was wet through and numbed with cold, having nothing on but a doublet, took off his own cloak and spread it over him. Michael neither accepted nor refused this act of kindness; at first he seemed not to perceive it, but when, on moving his arm, he felt the unaccustomed incumbrance, he rose upon his knees, took it off his back, and throwing it over his son's body, spread it and smoothed it out with the tenderest affection.

Once round the point, they saw the mole of Varenna glistening with lights, and heard the voices of the people with whom it was crowded; the vessel came close to the shore, and following the advice freely offered from that point, with a turn of the bow, got into the entrance of the harbor in safety. The country people then busied themselves about the men who had been rescued; they could not forbear from rallying the Limonta boatmen for allowing themselves to be caught in a squall. The latter kept silence for a while, but at last began to retort, and the wordy contest was speedily turning into a fight, when a voice was heard in the crowd saying that the Count's pilot was in the boat with the corpse of his son, who was drowned. In a moment the shouts and invectives were hushed, and changed into a general murmur of compassion. All manner of assistance was proffered to the poor father, who, refused everything, preferring to remain all night on guard over the corpse, which they purposed to transport to Limonta in the morning.

When the wind fell the night before, other vessels had arrived at Varenna from Limonta, and among them the one belonging to Michael himself, which he had lent to some of his fellow-townsmen. In the morning some pious hands laid in it the corpse of the drowned man. When the poor father reached the shore, and saw his bark and the burden they had laid upon it, his eyes filled with tears, but making a strong effort, he got on board calmly, and taking up one of the oars, put it against the shore and pushed off; then he began to row the boat with both oars slowly away from the shore.

The lake was quite calm, and bright as a mirror. The sky was a brilliant azure color, and the air clear and soft. Every cottage, house, and little church, as well on the high mountain ranges as on the slopes that came down to the water's edge, stood clearly out to the view.

This spectacle of joy and peace was only too sharp a contrast to the anguish and mental agitation of the unfortunate boatman, who went rowing on for some time in silence, though growing sadder every moment, till at last, in a frenzy of rage and grief, he struck the water with all his might with the oar he held in his right hand, exclaiming "Thou treacherous lake!" when the oar broke, and pulling the other awkwardly into the boat, with the stump of the first still remaining in his hand, he struck such a blow on the gunwale that he broke one of the rowlocks.

But while he was going on in this way, he made the vessel give such a lurch that it displaced a third oar that was lying on a bench, which slipped down and all but fell upon his son's body. This frightened Michael, who leaped forward, seized the oar as it was falling, and holding it in his hands for a moment, looked at it, and said, "It is his," and then gently replaced it.

"O Lord!" he then exclaimed, "help me, and have me in Thy holy keeping, lest Satan tempt me to kill myself in despair, and lose my soul," and then returned to his rowing, fervently repeating his devotions.

Thus he prayed, ever urging the boat forward, bending alternately backward and forward to the oars; and while his lips murmured the accustomed words, the unhappy man ran over in his mind all the stages of his dead son's life—first as a baby, then a child, then a boy, then as a grown-up young man, down to that last fatal day. He called to mind the first imperfect utterances; words that had made him feel all the charms of paternity: all the fond hopes he had conceived of him, which were so well justified by his advancing years. Then recurred to his memory all the past hopes of the support and repose which were to soothe his declining years; nor could he forget the mother's comfort and delight when she saw him guide his little bark to land, after his first voyage, having spent the night in an agony of terror, listening to the wind whistling through the chestnut-trees, and ever and anon looking out of window at the lake, and asking, "Where can my Arigozzo be now?"

Meanwhile, the vessel drew near to Limonta, and now a fresh and more intense affliction, at the sight of the well-known localities, obscured the mind of the bereft father and the wretched husband. For as he approached the shore, he saw it covered with a crowd of people looking toward him, and apparently waiting for him; and in the midst of them was a woman tearing her hoary and disheveled locks, and beating her breast wildly, while the shore and the mountains reëchoed her incoherent and despairing shrieks.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAIDEN'S SECRET

THAT night the whole party was taken in by the parish priest, who could hardly realize that he had such distinguished guests under his roof and boasted of it long afterward.

Pelagrua was still in a sad plight, without any protector or money, or connections of any kind, with the prospect before him of soon having to leave the district where he had made himself so odious, and he could find no one to say a good word for him. The poor wretch came in the morning quite humiliated—at least, outwardly so—to the priest of Limonta, begging him with many piteous entreaties to forgive him, out of charity, all the mischief he had done in the past, and the greater mischief he had desired to do him, and to tell him how to find some remedy for his case, which was wellnigh desperate.

The good priest had compassion not so much for the man himself—who would have been none the worse for a little punishment—but for his innocent wife and child, and, therefore, promised to plead his cause with Count del Balzo, though, to say the truth, he did not hope much from that quarter. But, luckily for the unfortunate wretch, when the priest joined the Count he found him with his daughter and Ottorino. The maiden, naturally kind and pitiful, had seen Pelagrua's wife on the occasion of her taking refuge in the castle, and had shared with her mother in the sympathy inspired by that poor woman's troubles. So now she was much moved by the priest's appeal, and made a great point with her father that he should provide an asylum for the miserable family.

These entreaties were not very acceptable to the Count, who wished for nothing less than to risk breaking altogether with the Abbot of San Ambrogio, and especially in a concern which was likely to make him highly unpopular with all the people of Limonta.

But he was unwilling to deny his daughter openly, and therefore busied himself in inventing excuses and pretences, hesitated, and twisted himself about; but Ottorino, too happy to be able to please the lady, and to find favor with her father, offered to take in Pelagrua himself, and, the affair being now regarded as settled, he received from Beatrice, by way of thanks, a look of such heartfelt gratitude that the young man felt the charm of it thrill through his soul.

The priest of Limonta, taking the young man aside, thought it his duty to warn him as to the character of the man to whom he was about to do such a favor, feeling sure that such information ought to put him on his guard; but he did not listen with much attention to these admonitions, partly from the natural carelessness of his age, and partly because he could not endure that anyone who was, as it were, sanctified by the compassion of Beatrice, should remain in distress. He decided, not perceiving any better course, to send his *protégé* to Marco Visconti, who, for his sake, would, he was sure, place the man in one of his numerous castles. He accordingly sent for the necessary implements to write a letter to Marco, but in all that district not an inkstand, a pen, or a piece of parchment could be found for their weight in gold! The priest did not trouble himself with writing; the apothecary and the few local gentry had no idea how to use a pen. And this was not a peculiarity of the priest, the doctor, and the gentry of Varenna: it was the same story everywhere, and not only on the Lake of Como, but in all the country, in all Italy, in all Europe; and it was only natural. In a century when nothing was thought of but swords and lances and crossbows, fortresses and castles and battlefields, how could literature flourish—a tender, sensitive plant, which loves shade and solitude, and cannot stand being contemned and trampled upon? The falconer bethought himself of an old notary who used to inhabit Perledo, a small village on the mountain, on the skirts of which Varenna was situated, so hastened up there and returned with all that was needed.

In the letter that Ottorino wrote about Pelagrua, he was obliged to explain why and how it was he had become concerned in this man's affairs; he therefore narrated all that had happened to himself, from his squire's combat down to that present time. He spoke of the Count del Balzo, in whose castle he was about to pass some days, and then he touched on Beatrice, who was still uppermost in his mind, and dwelt on her more than was wise, if he did not wish it to be noticed. In short, wishing to describe the maiden to his chieftain in the most graphic manner, he, with youthful vehemence, asserted that she was, in the opinion of everyone, the exact image of her mother, both in person and manners.

Our party embarked in a hired gondola, and arrived at Limonta toward evening. Here they found a rumor current that the Abbot of San Ambrogio was determined to punish severely the insurrection, whatever might be the issue of the ordeal. This and other causes united together, the arrival that morning of the poor drowned corpse, the harrowing spectacle of the desolation of his parents, and the long waiting for the Count's boat, so surprisingly deferred, now all helped to cool that first ardor of gratitude towards the youthful victor; so that when Lupo came ashore, he did not find the crowd he expected, nor was he received with the triumph and applause he had hoped for.

The priest remained at Limonta; all the others, mounting horses which were in readiness for them, ascended the steep and narrow road to the castle.

Ermelinda received with her usual kindness her young guest, who was especially welcome to her from the remembrance of the close friendship that once had subsisted between him and her poor son; but very soon she began to experience some uneasiness at the attentions she saw him bestow on Beatrice—and all the more because it did not escape the penetration of the good mother that the girl received them with much modest complacency.

Soon she observed that a conscious and reserved happiness had taken the place of the open, frank mirth of the young maiden; she saw her blush if she questioned her about Ottorino, and lower her eyes, not daring to meet the maternal glance; so that she began to be seriously disturbed. Not that she considered this an unsuitable match for her daughter, for indeed it would have been impossible to provide for her in a more distinguished manner, but there was a general report that the young knight was already betrothed to a daughter of Franchino Rusconi, a noble of Como, and that Marco Visconti was arranging the affair.

As to the Count, enchanted to have in his house a knight of such reputation, a cousin of the abbot, a follower of Marco, he was much occupied in making the visit as pleasant as possible; and whenever it was a question of a banquet, a hunting-party, or an expedition in the neighborhood, Beatrice was always with them. At every moment he sang the praises of his young guest, and it was his pleasure to go over all that he had done for their protection at the time of the shipwreck, recalling every moment of that day, of those hours passed on the rocks, which the girl remembered perhaps already only too well, and always with an emotion, and with a thrill that was not all terror.

The Count had discovered recently in the knight one virtue which, in his eyes, gave a higher value to all the others: and this was a deference to his opinion; a willing ear to all the stories of his doings, and an acquiescing in his boasting chat.

"He is a polite youth," he said; "not like those raw boys one sees now-a-days, who are hardly out of the nursery, when they pretend to instruct their elders. Did you notice," he asked Beatrice, one day, "when I was explaining to him all the circumstances of the combat between Lupo and Ramengo, how attentively he listened to me two hours, without stirring a finger?" And this was the simple truth, for all that time the boy, who was sitting close to Beatrice, was as one might say, in a trance, and had never heard a syllable of what was said.

If Ermelinda departed at times from her usual diffidence, and begged her husband to be more on his guard, he called her fears ridiculous fancies, and desired her to be silent on the subject. The good lady, not being able, as she wished, to clear up the affair by mentioning it candidly to Ottorino, because the Count had decidedly forbidden her to do so, was obliged to be content with the only other course open to her, which was to write to Como to ascertain the truth and the nature of the engagement into which the knight had entered, and while she was waiting for the information, to watch her daughter carefully, and to try to keep her from the company of the youthful guest, and to distract her thoughts from him.

The maiden, though slightly self-willed and capricious, as young people are apt to be, was in the main of a very sweet disposition: she had always loved her mother with more reverence, and even tenderness, notwithstanding her occasional severity, than the Count with all his indulgence; and was more pleased with a smile or caress from her than with all her father's more open demonstrations.

But since Ottorino had been at the castle, a noticeable change in this particular had arisen. Ermelinda, with her somewhat cold manner, with those words sometimes of admonition, sometimes of reproof, held the girl at a distance, chilled and blighted her soul, full of a new life, of an unknown sensation which prompted her to confidence and enthusiasm. The name of the young man, which filled her with joy when mentioned by the Count, caused her to tremble with fright when she heard it from her mother; in consequence, she escaped as much as she could from being alone with her, and it is not to be wondered at that the great love which she had always borne her should diminish from day to day in some degree. She, having at times surprised in her heart a shrinking distaste which quite alarmed her, would then reproach herself bitterly and make a thousand good resolutions to return to her former filial cordiality, which she had not the strength to keep.

This struggle lasted a few more days, when suddenly a message arrived from Marco Visconti, which caused Ottorino to announce that in two days he should be expected at Milan.

To Beatrice this seemed a dream; she could not realize that he must depart; she found it so charming to be with him that when she was separated from him she thought how she should see him again in two, three, or four hours; this thought occupied and consoled her during his absence; the hours passed away, and Ottorino re-appeared; but when he was gone what should she do all the day, all those long evenings?

She recalled the happy days she had spent in her home, before this fatal guest had come. She still had her mother, her young attendant, her lute, her books, her bay steed: but her heart no longer responded to these images, formerly so much to her.

The next day, the day before Ottorino's departure, was destined by the Count to be the occasion of a hawking-party, and Beatrice had already been told that she was to accompany it.

"I wish you to see my birds fly," said her father to his guest, "and you shall tell me if Marco Visconti has any to compare with them; you will see sparrow-hawks, Irish gerfalcons, and some from Norway and Denmark; I have some brought up at home, and others from foreign parts: and a splendid pack of hounds famous for both staunchness and breed. And then I have to show you my favorite falcon, trained by myself, because I like accustoming one of them to my hand on a new plan, which I have invented."

That same day arrived a letter from Como, after receiving which, Ermelinda remained for a long time in consultation with her husband. Beatrice from her room, where she had shut herself up with her attendant, heard the voices of her parents raised in the excitement of a dispute, and guessed the subject of it only too well.

All day she managed to keep away from her mother, and to join her only in the evening at supper. She saw her then silent and sad, and from time to time looking at the girl as if she had a secret to reveal to her. Afraid to find herself alone with her, as soon as she could do so fairly, under excuse of having to rise early in the morning for the chase, she took the liberty of retiring for the night. As soon as she was shut into her room she felt new life, and seated herself before a mirror to have her hair arranged by Lauretta before lying down. The damsel, who had discovered the secret of her young mistress's heart, began to speak of Ottorino with hidden meaning, which Beatrice would willingly have resented, and would have shown her displeasure, if the flames of color which the words called to her cheeks could have been attributed to irritation rather than to modesty.

The hair being finished, Lauretta was about to undress her, when a gentle knock was heard at the door, and Ermelinda's voice saying, "Open; it is I."

"Leave me with her," she continued to the attendant, who had hastened to undo the fastenings, and now with a curtsey retired into the next room.

Beatrice, now alone with her mother, would have gladly sunk through the floor with confusion, and casting down her eyes, she waited for what she was to hear.

"I see that my presence is not welcome," began Ermelinda, "and I grieve to see it; and I grieve for you, my child."

The maiden tried to answer, but her voice was stifled; she stammered indistinctly some senseless words, and then was silent.

"I never could have believed that you would fear your mother," continued the lady; "it is true that lately I have seen that you are changed in some way toward me, that you are not so fond of me as you used to be; but what have I done to you to make you afraid? It is too sad for one who loves you so much."

"I do not fear: why should I?" answered the girl, vehemently, for the vexation of seeing herself so agitated had restored some of the natural vigor of her character.

"Beatrice, why do you answer with such irritation?" said the mother in a severe voice; but afterward, as if she could not resist a sudden impulse, she took one of her daughter's hands in hers, and went on: "Listen to me, my dear; do not speak so to your mother. Do you believe that I could have any thought or care in the world but to see you happy? I have no other blessing but you—you are my only comfort. Oh! if you could know how grieved I am every time I see myself obliged to thwart you; but it is necessary sometimes when it is my duty, and for your good. Do you remember, my darling, when you were very little, and fell very ill, and one day were crying to have some milk? You may believe that it nearly broke my heart to refuse you the milk, but I did so for it would have been injurious to you. I know not what may have been passing through that obstinate little head, but you will understand now."

"But what do you mean to imply?" asked Beatrice, half moved, and half angry at her own emotion.

"I mean this—but come, do not look at me with those frightened eyes. No, my dear daughter, you will never hear a bitter word from your mother's lips; come here, listen to me, calmly and tenderly, as I promise to speak to you. Ottorino goes to-morrow."

The girl, at the mention of that name, felt herself turn to ice, but, putting force on herself, she answered with the greatest appearance of indifference that she could muster, "Yes, I know; but what is that to me?"

"More than I could wish for my peace and yours," replied Ermelinda in a stern voice; "do not deceive me; you cannot blind one who reads your heart."

"But what harm have I done? I have only obeyed my father."

"Yes, you have been very eager to obey your father these few last days, more so than you ever were before. Once you paid some little attention to my wishes, and without displeasing him, you ruled your life according to my counsels; but, my poor child, I do not mean to reprimand you, you did not know what you were doing —you thought, perhaps—it is true the fault is in a great degree also mine, but I ought to have spoken to you before with greater decision; and yet I also had a secret hope, but now I know positively"—

"What do you know? asked the girl, fixing her eyes on her mother's as if to draw out the sense of her words before she uttered them.

"I know that Ottorino—in short, you must never think again of him, because he has already given his promise, and soon will be the husband of the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, a noble of Como."

Beatrice blushed crimson, and then became as pale as if she had just risen from the dead; she tried for another moment to control herself, forcing on her trembling lips a smile, which soon was dissipated, for, quite overwhelmed and conquered by her feelings, she began to weep.

The mother read in those tears the confession which shame had extinguished on the lips, and so, putting her arms round her daughter, and tenderly kissing her, she said, "Yes, weep, my darling, weep with your mother. Do you think I do not know how to pity you, that I think less well of you for this, that you have fallen in my opinion? No, my dear, my good child. If it were possible for you to be nearer my heart than you were before, you are so now on account of these tears."

Beatrice, subdued by these words, and still more by the inexpressible affection with which they were pronounced, threw her arms around her mother's neck, and hid her face in that loving bosom.

"Now, you see for yourself," Ermelinda went on; "that it will not be seemly for you to be with him so familiarly as you were before; and that if your father still gives you opportunities, it is that he is far from having the least suspicion of his precious daughter; but you, who know your weakness, might by chance even betray yourself to him himself. In short, decorum demands that you should keep yourself away from him. To-morrow he will be out all day, and you will stay with me; the day after, he is going away, and you will be free from all anxiety, and everything will remain secret between us two." She was about to tell her what to reply to her father if he should come in the morning to summon her for the hawking-party, but at that moment she heard a footstep come up the stairs, which she recognized as the Count's; and, not wishing to be found there by him, she tore herself hastily from her daughter's arms, and, giving and receiving a last kiss, she went out, saying, "Your father is there; I must go."

Beatrice spent some time in composing herself, and then called her damsel to undress her. Lauretta saw that she was quite overcome, and did not venture to speak to her; except when she had put her to bed, she asked, according to her usual custom, what book she should bring her to read that evening. "Shall I give you the one you like so much, with the devils and the tortured souls?"*

"No; lower the curtains, put out the light, and go away."

And in the morning I am to awake you at dawn, am I not, so as to be ready for the hawking?"

"No, do not come till I call you."

"And what dress?"

"That is enough, go and leave me alone."

"Rough weather to-night," said the maid to herself, and obeyed.

Then Beatrice, throwing aside all restraint in her misery, pressed her face against the pillows so that her sobs should not be heard.

At last, conquered by fatigue and trouble, she sank into a tardy slumber, full of agitated dreams. But when in the morning she awoke, a little before dawn, she felt a faint ray of hope, without knowing whence she had

---

*The *Inferno* of Dante at that time (1329), only eight years after the death of the writer, a novelty in Italy, eagerly sought after by all people in whatever rank or station of life.

derived it; and when she again thought of her sorrows, an idea came to her which must have slowly worked into her mind during the night, and, in some measure, it cooled the great flame that had been kindled there.

This idea was, that it was possible what her mother had told her of Ottorino might not be true, and that she ought not too hastily to condemn him. So straightforward and good as he was, she said to herself, and after his frank and open conduct! And yet the first belief continued to make her heart ache, and she longed to be relieved from it. If she could have found herself with her father, it would have been easy to make him clear up this mystery, without allowing him to perceive the real clue to it; but her father was to start at dawn, and if she did not accompany him she would not see him till evening; she would remain all the day in this agony of mind, and on his return it might be difficult to see him alone, so as to make him act before Ottorino departed. She resolved to rise betimes to be ready at the first summons, to see her father alone while the last preparations were going on, and to lead him to her purpose, firmly decided, at the same time, not in any case to accompany him on the expedition, in order not to disobey her mother.

She then called Lauretta, who arrayed her in the hunting-dress, prepared the evening before, without Beatrice, who was deep in her own thoughts, perceiving it. When she heard her father's voice, she went down into his room, where she found him alone.

The Count hastened to meet his daughter: "Now," he said, "everything is ready; let us go."

"I am only come, dear father, to salute you, and wish you good morning," replied Beatrice, much embarrassed.

"Why, you silly child, what nonsense is this?"

"No," said she, resisting him when he was about to lead her out. "Let me stay here a minute; sit down, and let us speak a few words."

"You will have time to say a thousand words to me, instead of a few. We shall be together all day. Now that you are ready let us go without delaying the others."

"I have told you that I am not coming, and that I wish to stay at home."

"And I tell you to have done with such nonsense, and not to play the child."

At this moment Ottorino appeared in the room, and after the usual greetings, asking the father's leave, he took the maiden's hand, and conducted her into a courtyard, where a palfrey was awaiting her. The girl, as if bewitched, made no resistance; for one instant the idea of her mother's displeasure flashed across her mind, but how could she turn back, now that she was found at this early hour in her riding-dress?

The young knight took the horse's bridle from the hand of a page, and gave it to the damsel; and then, bending one knee on the ground, with the other he made a support for her delicate foot, and hardly touching him, she sprang up into the saddle.

Ottorino arranged her stirrup, the father familiarly took his arm, and they set off on foot, followed by the falconer and by four pages, with falcons on their wrists, and dogs in leashes.

The Count began to talk of his hounds and his sparrow-hawks to the young man, who did not listen to him with much attention when he saw Beatrice at his side, not uttering a word, or ever raising her eyes to his face.

After asking her whether she was well, whether anything had happened, how she liked the ride, what she thought of the weather, he became silent, for the manner with which she received these observations deprived him of all courage to renew them.

In about two hours, they arrived in a chestnut wood, when the pages and the falconer loosed from the leashes the dogs, which dispersed, ranging in all directions with their noses down, while the hawking-party and Ambrose ascended a hillock commanding the scene of action.

They were hardly arrived there, when the Count, turning to his daughter, said to her, "Look at Diana, how keen she is!" and pointed to a setting dog that was coming toward them, with its nose intent on the ground, waving its tail. "How steady she is! she is after a woodcock. Quick, take off Garbino's hood; quick—how slow you are this morning! Let him fly now that he has seen it; so, that's right! Look what a fine flight! Oh, nothing escapes him! Well done, my Garbino!"

The falcon descended from the air with its prey, and fell with it in a heap, on the little hill where the sportsmen had taken up their position. The Count ran down to take his woodcock from Garbino's claws, and the young knight took the opportunity to approach Beatrice, and to say, in an agitated manner, "For pity's sake, tell me what is the matter! If I have vexed you in any way, do not torment me thus, Beatrice, I implore you; you know I must leave you to-morrow."

"I know," interrupted the girl, with a smile that ill concealed the bitterness of her heart; "I know that you go to-morrow, for my mother has told me something of which you left me in ignorance; she has told me that you are to take the road to Como."

Although she tried to say these words with indifference, she could not help showing her secret feeling, and this the young man rapidly perceived.

He turned quite red, and began: "Hear me! I cannot deny—I had not seen you then—but I swear to you on my honor, Beatrice, I swear that for you alone"—but his words were cut short by the arrival of the Count, who was crying out to his falconer—"Give the bird his bill-full, and put on the hood quickly."

The maiden was convinced by the words, and still more by the agitation, of her companion, that the news her mother had announced to her was true. She felt struck down, annihilated; but recovering herself as quickly as she could, and feeling deeply ashamed of her humiliation, she felt her native pride return to her heart, nourished as it had been so long by the habit of seeing everything yield to her wishes; and from that moment showing herself intent on the dogs and the falcons, as if she were really devoted to the sport, she never left her father's side all that day, nor addressed a word or look to Ottorino, so that she succeeded in poisoning all the pleasure he had promised himself from that expedition.

The next morning the young knight departed for Milan, accompanied by Lupo; and she, full of her resentment, at first felt his departure a real relief. Her mother appeared grave and severe that day, and this only increased her anger; far from acknowledging her fault, she considered herself to be the one offended.

Disgusted with everybody and everything, she retired early to rest that evening, and the waiting-maid, who saw that her brow was again clouded, left her with her light burning, and departed as quickly as she could. She took from her table a parchment volume bound in leather, which was Dante's *Inferno.*

Beatrice pursued this study unknown to her mother; and even the Count required a great deal of urging before allowing her to read the book. It was not at all that he was afraid that the *Commedia Divina* would not be proper reading for a young girl; no, it was only because of an old grudge he had against Alighieri, on account of the Latin work entitled *De Monarchia,* published by that staunch Ghibelline many years before, which now, some years after the death of the author, began to make a great noise in Italy and Germany.

Only a few days before Ottorino's arrival at the castle, the Count had at last granted the long-desired volume to his daughter. It was, however, only the first poem, for though in Tuscany at that time the *Purgatorio* and some cantos of the *Paradiso* were read, in Lombardy the *Inferno* alone was known.

Beatrice had begun to read it in the evening, when she was shut up alone in her room, and studied it with great eagerness; and the delight naturally to be tasted in those weird pages, full of life and passion, was increased by the sad charm which the rebellious hearts of the daughters of Eve find in forbidden fruit.

She stretched out her hand to take the volume, opened it, and heard something rustle among the leaves, and afterward fall to the ground. What could it be? A paper —a letter—for her? From whom?

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF MARCO AND ERMELINDA

THE reader will remember the half-finished speech the Count addressed under his breath to Ottorino on the subject of Marco and Ermelinda when they were on their way from Bellano, to the effect that the Visconti in past times had tried hard to win that lady for his wife, and that terrible misadventures had prevented this result, which had caused much strife and bloodshed. Now Beatrice, who, without appearing to do so, had heard everything, felt a great inclination to learn the particulars of this affair; and not thinking it right to question outsiders, she had often asked her maid to learn the story from her own mother, the falconer's wife, who had been from a girl in the service of Ermelinda, and would know everything.

Lauretta, to whom anything appeared right that would please her mistress, and who desired now more than ever to find means to encourage and cheer her, instead of always seeing her weary and sad, set herself to coax her mother with such loving caresses that she, after putting the story off from day to day, at last, one evening when they were alone, making a long preamble that these were not things for a girl to know, and that she must take care never to repeat them, began the history in this manner:

"Simon Crivello, the father of Ermelinda, was very intimate with the father of Marco, and meeting often at each other's house, the young people, as was natural, had become attached, and Marco had promised my mistress to marry her. Young people are too quick about such things; they ought to find out first what their parents think. As to Crivello, he would have accepted the match willingly, but the difficulties all came from the side of Matteo Visconti, father of Marco, who was at that time among the very first in the land, and wished his son to mate with nothing less than a great princess or a daughter of a king. Time passed, and nothing came of it. And mark this! Ermelinda ought at the beginning to have listened to her mother, who told her that she should not speak to one who could never hope to marry her. She had told her this, but young people will not be ruled."

"Well, what happened?" interrupted Lauretta.

"Why, the Visconti were driven out of Milan, the Torriani got in there, and it was clear that my lady's father, who had been so friendly with Matteo, was one of the chief persons in managing the intrigue."

"Oh, what a shocking thing, and only for revenge at the alliance being refused!"

"Only too true! Then Crivello, eager to show the new lords that he had entirely broken with the Visconti, and fearing that Ermelinda should ever have a chance of being reconciled to Marco, wished to make her marry another man at once, the Count here, who had offered himself some time before. Ah, the poor thing! what a situation for her! She would not hear of breaking her promise to the Visconti, and she had to bear at home anger, and misery, and threats. Thus about twenty days passed, when I was awakened one night by a loud knocking at the door of my room, and called out, 'Who is it?' 'Your father, who has just come back from the Holy Land, and wants to see you directly,' one of the grooms of the house answered. In truth, my father had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher some time before, and was expected back any day. I threw on a few clothes and ran to open the door; and in came a man dressed as a pilgrim, with a hood over his eyes and a dark lantern in his hand. I threw my arms round his neck. He put down the lantern and raised his hood. My child, such a fright I never have had since. Guess who it was."

"Who? Marco?"

"Yes, Marco Visconti himself in flesh and blood, with his eyes starting out of his head, asked me, 'Where is Ermelinda?' 'For the love of God, for the Holy Virgin's sake! what do you want here?' I said to him; but he gripped my arm so that it remained livid for days afterward. 'Where is Ermelinda?' he insisted. 'You have not come for any evil purpose?' I managed to say; 'for pity's sake, have mercy on that poor creature, who is already half dead!' 'Is she in there?' he said, pointing to the room where she was. I, who hardly knew what I did, said, 'Yes;' and he made two or three steps toward the door, then stopped, as if he changed his mind, and said, 'Go in and tell her quietly that I am waiting here to speak to her.' What ought I to have done? Escape? that was impossible. Scream out?—he would have strangled me. So I went and found my lady, already half risen, who at my appearance asked me in a fright, 'What does that light mean, and who is there?' and because I did not answer at once, she began to cry, 'Shut the door! shut the door!' But just then a pleading voice was heard: 'Ermelinda, do not fear; it is I, your Marco!'

"Have you ever seen Tita, Tonio's wife, when she is seized with a fit while she is talking and laughing? Well, just like her, my mistress became as white as a sheet, and fainted dead away, so that I thought she was dead, and ran out tearing my hair and weeping like a lost soul.

"Marco, who out of good manners had not ventured before to come in, now took the lantern, and we entered the room together, and made her smell all kinds of scents, and bathed her face and temples, so that she opened her eyes and came to herself. You ought to have seen how like a lamb he behaved then; afterward, they say, he became a villain, a very devil. It may be true; I do not deny it; but he was then a good youth, and feared God, and I can bear witness to it; for see, he did not venture to raise a finger to touch her, but did all he could for her recovery, looking at her with a reverence and a devotion as if she were the Madonna—so humbly that he did not seem to me like that great soldier and prince. When he saw that Ermelinda had recovered, 'I am here,' he said, 'to keep my promise—to marry you, and take you away with me.'

"'O holy Virgin! O Lord God!' exclaimed the girl, without being able to say anything else.

"And he then, smiling, like one inclined to weep said:

"'It seems to you not very courteous to ask you to leave your home to follow the fortunes of one who hardly knows where to lay his head.'

"'Do not say so,' answered my lady, 'do not speak like that; you break my heart. For God's sake, fly, fly soon, for if you are seen, the Lord have pity on us!'

"'Fly!' repeated Marco. 'And do you think I have traveled so far, exposed myself to so many perils, concealing myself among people who would willingly give its weight in gold for my head, to turn back like a boy—like an idiot?'

"'But if my father found you here,' urged my mistress, 'woe to you!'

"'Woe to me! Do you think that if I did not remember he was your father, I would leave this house with unstained hands?' Ermelinda trembled all over. 'Let us go at once,' insisted Marco. 'I have still some friends who will guide us till I have brought you to a safe place; there is a horse ready for you below, and when we get to Bergamo we will be betrothed. In the interval, try to think that you are with your brother, or that you are in church.'

"I had caught my lady by her dress, and whispered to her, imploring her to take care of herself. I must say that he soon found this out, for he put one hand on my shoulder, and said, 'Enough, Marianna; leave her alone.' The words were not so terrible, but he uttered them with such a voice and expression, and with such a flash in his eyes, that I grew cold to my very marrow.

"Then Ermelinda, recovering her speech somewhat, began to entreat him.

" 'Do you wish me to run away from my home at night in this way, as if I were a wicked woman? It would make by poor mother die of grief and shame. Oh, no! let me alone; kill me, rather; kill me with your own hand, and I will submit.'

"Marco stood for a moment, looking down at her, and then uttered some mysterious words, which implied that if she refused to follow him he would not be content to have made this journey all for nothing, and that he should immediately seek her father to confront him. Perhaps he said this only to frighten her into agreeing to his wishes; but my lady, who took his meaning seriously, began to tremble, and threw herself down on the ground weeping, to implore him not to speak thus, but to give up his intention, and not terrify her so, or say such dreadful things with such passion! But he said nothing; and even seemed to wish to withdraw; and at last he appeared determined, and moved toward the door. Ermelinda then started to her feet like a mad thing, caught him by his arm, and cried out: 'No, you shall not leave this room till after you have killed me: I will defend him!'

"It was like throwing a pail of water on the fire. Visconti stopped, and resisted no longer. 'Very well,' he said, with a smile, fit to freeze all who saw it, 'be calm, you see I am still here; I will not move another step; do not be afraid of my escaping; call out, rouse the house, and summon the assassins—I will not stir!'

"It is impossible to describe the effect of these words on my mistress; he let her arms fall, stepped back, and remained a moment listening if any one was roused, but hearing that all was quiet, she joined her hands together, and said: 'Oh, Marco! forgive me, he is my father, after all. How can you speak to me so cruelly? If you knew how it wounds me. God above is witness how I would willingly give my life to save yours! I implore you to go away—to escape from here; who knows whether already you have not been discovered? Fly! for the love of God. If ever you have cared for me, fly now.'

"But he coldly held out his hand to her and said: 'Let us go together, then.' But when he saw that she drew back: 'No! you will not come? Well, I declare to you that I will not leave this room except in your company. See what I am doing?' and he sat down on the table, crossing one leg over the other, and folding his arms on his chest, as one resolved not to stir. 'I will wait here till to-morrow,' he went on, 'when some one must come in; perhaps it will be your father; so, if you wish to preserve him from danger you know what you have to do. Go to the window, and cry out that Marco is in your room. Let them come! let them come in troops, I shall not stir.'

"When my lady saw that there was no remedy—'Then, if you will compel me,' she said, and she knelt down before the figure of the Madonna, which was at the head of her bed, and remained an instant in prayer, then rising, she said to me: 'You will tell my mother.' But her tears stifled her voice. The young knight took her hand, and she walked after him with a vacant expression, as one asleep. But they were no farther than the threshold, when they heard a storm of footsteps dashing up the staircase. Marco stopped one moment; then drawing suddenly back, he struck his forehead and exclaimed—'We have no time now.' In the twinkling of an eye he had shut the door, locked it inside with the key, opened his doublet with one hand, and drawn out a poniard; with the other he took from his neck a gold chain, and with a vigorous pull, broke it in the middle, hid one half in his bosom, and placed the other in Ermelinda's hand, saying eagerly to her: 'This will be the token of our constancy. I hope to return soon in another condition than now; in any case, do not break your word; till you receive the other half of this broken chain, you will know that I am alive, and that my only thought is to make you my wife.' He was still speaking, when a vehement knock was heard at the door. Marco opened a window, which looked on the garden, and leaped down. I ran to let in those outside, who were now storming at the door, as if they wished to batter it down. In rushed seven or eight armed men, and began to search everywhere; but hearing a loud uproar below, they went off in a great hurry to add to it.

"We poor creatures knew nothing more all night: there were shouts and steps and blows, then all was silent.

"In the morning Milan was full of the affair. In Crivello's garden, two servants of the house were found dead; and the story was that Marco had already got in safety beyond the barriers when he found that he had dropped his helmet, so he turned back, spurred his horse against a man who had picked up that piece of armor, gave him a blow on the temple which stretched him for dead on the ground, jumped down from his horse, recovered his helmet, sprung on the saddle, and still had time to save himself.

"Then came more troubles for poor Ermelinda. Crivello quite understood that Marco had come with the intention of carrying off his daughter, and imagining that it had been arranged between them, hurried up to her with even more anger than usual; and entering in a furious manner, assured her, with many protestations, that Marco, if he had taken her away, never would have married her; and abused him and all his family with great violence; ending with telling her that she must decide between two courses: either to marry immediately the Count del Balzo, or to wither away below the earth, where she should not see the light of day.

"Ermelinda would not hear of breaking her faith to Visconti, and her father kept his word, and had shut her up in a tower. One fine day, without any notice, they seized me, and stuck me in a nasty room, like a prison, and began to persecute me incessantly, and to frighten me in every way, and all to make me tell my mistress's secrets. I remained firm for a time, but by degrees I allowed myself to be questioned, and began to relate all that I knew, from her first acquaintance with Marco down to his last appearance in Crivello's house, without concealing even the new compact of the young people, or the token of the chain which had passed between them; I told all, in short. After that I was allowed a little more liberty, and treated rather more gently; but as to leaving my prison, that was not their game at all; they kept me shut up for six months more; after which they told me that Ermelinda had married the Count, our master here; that she wished for me, and so if I liked to go back to her, as before, I might.

"You may believe that I did not require much urging. They took me to Limonta, where I found my mistress, who did not look like a bride, but more like a corpse risen from the tomb, so fallen away did she look, and so gone off in beauty. She gave me a most warm welcome, and presently told me that Marco had sent her back the token of the chain, which she showed to me; and I saw it was the identical one, for I compared it with the piece she still had, which left no doubt on the subject. Then she told me the manner in which he had returned it.

"During the time she was confined in the tower, she was allowed to go out on the leads every day to breathe a little fresh air. The tower looked on a courtyard, where no one ever entered except the family of the lord of the manor; till one day, after perhaps four months, a buffoon was admitted, who began to show off a number of tricks, and at last threw in the air four or five oranges, one after the other, caught them, and threw them up again, while a Moorish girl danced to the sound of a pipe. Now, while she sat among the battlements looking at these wonders, she felt one of the oranges fall into her lap, and saw written on the rind these words, 'Marco and Ermelinda,' so she opened the orange and found in it a letter and the piece of chain I told you about.

"My lady read me the letter, which, young as she was, she could make out as well as a clerk. He said that he had heard what her father had made her suffer for his sake, and he would not be the cause of her death; that he was also vehemently pressed by his own family to marry a daughter of the Lord of Verona, who had promised to assist in recovering his lost territory, and so he went on, and concluded by releasing my mistress from her promise, sending her the token agreed upon; and then he actually himself urged her to agree to marry the Count del Balzo, who, he said, if he had no other recommendation, was not at any rate an enemy of the Visconti.

"A year later, Ermelinda was out hunting one day on the plain of Colico, and being apart from the rest, she saw an armed man riding toward her, with his visor down, who, when he was close to her, stopped, and said, 'I am come to demand from the Countess del Balzo the token given by Marco to Ermelinda.' She recognized the voice immediately, and nearly fell from her horse; but had just strength enough to take from her bosom, where she always kept them, the letter and the chain, and presented them to the knight who had asked her for them."

"It was Marco, was it not?"

"He himself. He read the writing, looked at the chain, and gnashing his teeth like a wild beast, exclaimed, 'The letter is forged, the chain was stolen from me; we have both been betrayed! Farewell, Ermelinda! we may perhaps never meet again; but if I survive this shock you will hear more of me.' And then to shake his bridle, plunge his spurs into his horse's flanks, and to disappear behind some thickets, was the work of a moment."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the girl, much affected.

"In time," pursued Marianna, "it became known that the chain had been taken from Marco's neck while he was sick unto death, and sent to Crivello by that same groom who had knocked at my door that night I described, and who had then escaped with Visconti, and had entered his service. Out of greediness for a large sum of money offered him by Crivello, the wretch betrayed his new master as he had his old one; but it was not necessary for him to go to the Pope to get absolution. No, in truth, Marco set off to find him in France, where he had taken refuge, and killed him with his own hand.

"And Ermelinda's father had also to pay dearly for his treachery, for Marco came upon him at Trezzo, while fording the Adda, and pierced him through with a lance."

"Now, I understand," said the daughter, "why our mistress, when she by chance hears Marco's name mentioned, shakes all over, and seems to feel a shock through her whole frame. But what was the explanation of the buffoon and the oranges?"

"Can't you guess? That was a cunning invention of Crivello's to give color to the affair, and make his daughter fall into the trap."

"Oh! what a number of wicked devices to destroy a poor creature!" exclaimed Lauretta; and then she thanked her mother for her kindness, and ran off at once to tell Beatrice all she had heard.

Marco Visconti, the second son of the great Matteo, had followed his father with fidelity and affection both in prosperity and adversity, and had always been his favorite. He was of a noble disposition, a ready wit, and of great bodily activity, so that he had always been among the first in all bodily sports and exercises which appertained to a gentleman, according to the fashion of the time. Yet even from a boy his incomparable superiority had been forgiven by all his rivals on account of the modesty of his demeanor, a virtue rendered more than usually pleasing in him because of his noble birth, his handsome countenance, and his personal activity.

He was a valiant and fortunate leader in the field, and had acquired by degrees a glorious reputation as one of the first captains of the age. The most celebrated of all his exploits was the siege of Genoa, that carried out by him with a skill and determination that were considered marvelous at the time, against the whole power of the Church, the chief Guelph cities of Italy, and King Robert of Sicily. It was on that occasion, having received an intimation from that monarch that if he did not at once retire from the Genoese territory, he might expect to see him under the walls of Milan, he sent back word to King Robert that he need not trouble himself to go so far as that, as he was to be found beneath the walls of Genoa itself at any time, and challenged him formally to single combat; whereat history says the king was very angry, but thought it best to take no notice.

Galeazzo, Marco's elder brother, who afterward succeeded his father Matteo in the government of Milan, was jealous of the reputation acquired by his younger brother, and had frequently remonstrated with his father for entrusting him with the flower of his troops, especially in such desperate enterprises; which had engendered a secret grudge between the two brothers.

But Matteo having died at a critical period, excommunicated by the Pope, and not at all sure of the allegiance of his subjects, besides being hemmed in by enemies on every side, his sons at once recognized the necessity of acting together; so Marco reconciled himself with his elder brother, and was of the greatest assistance to him in the long fight he had to sustain against the Church and the exiles.

However, as soon as Galeazzo found himself firmly settled in his hereditary dominions, he made himself so obnoxious to the Milanese by his tyrannical conduct and exorbitant taxation, that they soon were desirous to regain the liberties of their old municipal life. Marco, too, refusing to submit to the despotic rule of his brother over a state that he had preserved and enlarged at the risk of his own life, joined the malcontents in an endeavor to bring about a change of government; and when the Ghibelline chiefs of several of the Italian cities went to solicit Louis of Bavaria, the Emperor elect of Germany, to come to their assistance, Marco went with them to Trent, and accused his brother before that Prince of intriguing with the Pope to make his peace with the Church, and so betraying the cause of the Ghibellines and the empire.

A short time afterward, when the Emperor passed from Lombardy into Tuscany, and thence to Rome, where he committed the extraordinary folly of deposing John XXII in favor of another Pope after his own heart, Marco Visconti formed one of his suite, and was high in his favor, and did his utmost to obtain the release of his relatives. At last the Emperor granted his request, and after eight months' suffering, the Visconti were set free from the celebrated prisons, the Forni di Monza. These were certain chambers, placed one above another in the various levels of the rocks, into which a man was let down by a hole in the roof, completely dark, with a convex and uneven floor, and so low and narrow that a person could neither stand upright nor lie down at full length, but was forced to remain in a stooping position, or standing bent double, with indescribable torture. Galeazzo himself had invented those horrible places, to torment his state prisoners in, but was the first to try them, thus fulfilling a prophecy current at the very time they were in course of construction.

Soon after his liberation, Galeazzo, worn out by the severity of his incarceration, died near Pistoja, and thus gave an opportunity for a large party at Milan, where the Baron di Monteforte had already made himself unbearable, to declare themselves in favor of Marco.

But whether it was that Louis the Bavarian took umbrage at the name of that formidable captain, and at the affection felt by the Milanese for him, and felt that he could not hope to domineer at his will over a disposition like his, or that he would not run the risk of changing the order of succession already established by custom, or that the Ghibelline lords threw suspicion on Marco's fidelity, or lastly, whether his two brothers, Luchino and Giovanni, who were more in favor of the pretensions of their young nephew Azzone, managed to gain over the Emperor with large promises of money, of which he was always very fond, and at that time was more in need of than usual, it is a fact that Louis of Bavaria appointed Azzo Visconti, the son of Galeazzo, as viceroy of the city and district, he binding himself to pay Louis a large sum for the investiture.

The Milanese were furious at this, and Marco, offended with the Emperor, his brother, his nephew, and the Ghibelline nobles, began a secret intrigue with the city of Florence and with Cardinal Bertrando del Poggetto, the Pope's legate in Lombardy, and obtained from them large promises of men and money to help him to reinstate himself in the sovereignty of his father's dominions.

CHAPTER VIII

MARCO AT HOME

OTTORINO, who had hastened to Milan, in obedience to the summons sent him, now entered Marco's palace, leaving Lupo in an outer hall in company with some soldiers, while he passed into an inner room, where the master of the house was engaged in dictating a letter to his secretary.

Marco, a man of tall and powerful stature, at the time of this narative had reached the prime of life. The hardships he had endured in his laborious and stormy career had worn off the bloom and fire of youth, and had substituted instead a stern and serene gravity, a tempered pride, a somewhat melancholy expression which, without being absolutely soured and perturbed by care and trouble, still revealed the habitual restlessness of his spirit. His face, which was thin and unusually colorless, was set off by a thick, soft, and coal-black beard, and by a pair of piercing eyes, surmounted by overhanging eyebrows. From time to time the fierce workings of his mind brought back the color to his cheeks, and with it the appearance of his early youth and beauty, joined to a singular mingling of haughtiness and diffidence. But at times, when seized with a paroxysm of rage, his countenance was, in one instant, entirely transformed; then his habitual pallor merged into a deathly hue, his forehead assumed an awful frown, his eyes became dark and lurid with an evil light.

He wore a mantle of black velvet, open in front and lined with miniver, over a silk doublet fastened at the waist by a band with a rich golden buckle, and in the belt was a large poniard with a handle covered with rubies; one of those weapons called at that time "misericordie," because when an enemy was vanquished in the fight, this served to despatch him, giving him, in short, the *coup de grâce*.

His head was uncovered, and his black hair was parted on his ample and noble forehead, and fell in thick masses round his temples. When he saw Ottorino enter the room, he made him a sign with his hand to sit down, saying, "One moment, and I am at your service;" then turning to his secretary, who, with his pen suspended, looked at his master, and made a movement to retire, "No, no," he said, "go on, my cousin here ought to know everything," and continued to dictate the last sentences of a letter to the legate of the Pope at Bologna. The letter was in the rough Latin of that time, and the words which concluded it ran thus:

"Castel Leprio and the Martesana still obey my voice" (these districts were fiefs of Marco's); "the friends of the republic are not exhausted, the lion is asleep now, but when I have roused him his roaring will be heard as far as the Vatican; the bearded drunkard" (the appellation used in Milan to denote Louis the Bavarian) "will bite his nails soon. Long live the Church! and death to the traitors to their country! my old war-cry."

To understand the force of these last words, we must explain that Marco had uttered them eight years before, when having discomfited the Pope's people, he had attacked some Milanese exiles, who were fighting among them. They were words that became famous at that time, and that showed that in his secret heart Visconti was not inimical to the Church, even when he opposed her arms in hand.

When the letter was finished, and the secretary had departed, Marco said to Ottorino with a smile: "So you are back at last! You hardly expected that I should send after you, did you?"

"I did not think"— began the boy, excusing himself.

"Enough—you are here now, and all is forgiven." A few other words were exchanged, and then Marco, putting his hand familiarly on his cousin's shoulder, began to relate to him the causes that had determined him in becoming reconciled with the Pope at Avignon, and confided to him all his new schemes.

"So now it must be, 'Long live Pope Giovanni!' " exclaimed Ottorino; "but what will become of Nicholas Fifth, whose cause we have so often defended?"

"He will become what he is already, a schismatic and a hypocrite."

"Then we must go to school, so as to learn the jargon of the Guelphs."

"But you see by these means we shall be again blessed by the Church," said Marco.

"Yes, but then the other side will excommunicate us," replied Ottorino.

Then the celebrated captain, becoming serious, began, "After all, you know well that the legitimate Pope is the one at Avignon. He has persecuted my father, our family, all our friends; he has excommunicated us, he has done us all the evil in his power; but all the time he never has ceased to be the true Pope. Do you think I could feel at ease all these years, knowing myself under sentence of the Church?"

The youth, who never had suspected any thoughts like these in the proud mind of his cousin, looked at him in astonishment, and listened to him, as he proceeded with an agitated mien. "The memory of my poor father has often saddened the joy of my triumphs. To see that venerable head, which you know might have raised itself proudly above all the princes of Italy, under the Pope's ban! He, the conqueror of the temporal forces of his enemy, always ridiculed the spiritual; but when, full of years, he felt the approach of his last days, and that the world was escaping from him, he began to fear him whom he had despised all his life. The night never will pass away from my recollection, when he, excited by awful fancies, sent for all his household and for the clergy of Saint Giovanni at Monza, and kneeling before the altar repeated the creed of our religion, declaring that he wished to die within the pale of holy Church, and weeping bitter tears that his head could not be laid in consecrated ground. If you had seen his face, which had been calm in the midst of dangers, and serene during the bitterness of exile, subdued by that mysterious terror!"

Ottorino could hardly recover from his astonishment, and if it had not been for the vehemence with which Marco spoke, he would have questioned his being in earnest.

"I always believed," said the young man, at last, "that the case stood thus: Pope Giovanni was the heretic and Niccolo the rightful one: I heard it so stated by our theologians and by you, from whom, though you are a soldier, they could often learn. Since I was a boy, I have done nothing but fight against this same Pope, who was said to be false and now apparently turns out the real Pope. I hardly know what to think of it all."

Marco replied: "You ought to be grateful to those vile Ghibellines for having thrust us by force on the right road. Do you know it is this very Pope who has opened voluntarily his arms to me? who has promised me the troops of the Church to help me conquer my paternal dominions? And do not believe that I should confide blindly in a man who has always been my enemy. I trust in the force of circumstances to constrain him to ally himself with me for his safety. The power of the Bavarian is diminishing from day to day; many of his partisans are outlawed, crushed, betrayed by him, and are abandoning his banner. Milan is still faithful to him, but I can make her rebel. The Milanese are beginning to understand at last on which side are justice and faith; they are tired of the interdict."

"But, notwithstanding what you say," replied Ottorino, "the city is still full of preachers who go through the streets and squares gathering audiences, and crying out all manner of abuse of Giovanni Twenty-second. I heard one just now who was spouting out big words, saying he was a murderer and a sorcerer."

"Well, you will soon hear another story."

"And what will that be?"

"You will hear preaching against Niccolo, and in favor of Giovanni."

"I can hardly believe you. It would be too barefaced."

"You see," said Marco, with a confiding gesture, "the Pope has given leave to a few priests to go back into the district, in order to help me in my enterprise, without they themselves knowing or suspecting it. I shall direct them secretly, with the help of the Abbot of San Vittore, and this very day they are beginning to spread abroad to bring wanderers into the fold."

"But if Azzone lays his hands on the first who appears, and silences him?" asked Ottorino.

"He won't do that; he fears the people too much; and if he did it, he would repent it. Out of their blood would arise many to revenge them. Do you believe they are afraid of death? What is death, after all? Did we not risk it many times on the field of battle for a little land, for a mere name, for a childish caprice? and for him who has in view an eternal reward?" But here he stopped, lowered his head, and remained silent for a few moments. When he looked up his excitement had disappeared; and turning to his cousin with an indifferent and somewhat sneering manner, he continued thus: "And after all, Avignon has already made so many martyrs in order to crush me, they might as well make a few to set me on my feet again. You have no scruples, have you?"

"You don't think I should have? And besides, you know I am only a weapon in your hand."

"And I put full trust in it, for I know well its fine temper. I must tell you now what has been agreed upon with our cousin Lodrisio; he will begin to arm his vassals under pretence of giving assistance at a time of need to his brother, the Abbot of San Ambrogio, who is sending troops to Limonta to punish those peasants for their revolt: as you have come thence, of course, you know all about it.'

"Thoroughly, and I must say I am really sorry for those poor mountaineers, who escaped only by the hair of their heads, and if it could be"—

"What would you have? It is a fancy of the Abbot Cardinal, and now we have so much upon us!"

"And I am also annoyed," pursued the youth, "that Count del Balzo, who lives close there, should have to suffer inconvenience."

"Oh, by-the-by, tell me something of that Count; is he still as great a chatterbox as he was when a young man?"

"Poor man!" answered Ottorino, not being able to say No, and not wishing to say Yes.

"And Ermelinda, his wife, did you see her?"

"Undoubtedly I did. I stayed a fortnight under her roof; she is an angel of goodness!"

Marco rose to his feet, and walked a few steps to and fro, and then continued: "And Beatrice resembles her?"

"She is her mother all over, without a hair's difference."

"You wrote great things of her to me from Varenna. Do you know that man you sent me—what's his name—Pelagrua? I have placed him in my castle of Rosati; he seems to me an active fellow, and may be of use to me. One thing more I must tell you, that your great praise of Beatrice does not please me much; it looks like disloyalty to the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, who, they say, is mad about you; and, in short, I want this connection confirmed soon; it will make Como decidedly ours."

Ottorino answered not a word.

"Another thing comes into my head; tell me, is your Count del Balzo as frantic a Guelph as he used to be when he was a boy?"

"More than ever, I should say."

"Then make him come to Milan," said Marco; "in these times a wealthy gentleman, of an illustrious family, who always must be talking, whether on the right or the wrong side, who delights in dabbling in law and decrees, and has always been Guelph down to his very marrow —why, he is sent to us from heaven: you must do your best to make him come."

"The fact is, he would have too many scruples, and he leads a quiet life among his mountains."

"You may also say of him, if I judge him rightly, that he would be afraid of trusting himself in a city given up to Ghibellinism; well, conquer that fear by a greater one, and tell him that a band of savages is going to Limonta, and will do devil's work there; that the Abbot of San Ambrogio is convinced that he favored the revolt of his vassals; in short, scare him from his nest, and make him take flight hither."

"I should not like," answered Ottorino, hesitating, "to be the cause of his incurring any risk."

"How timid you have become, cousin," said Marco, fixing his eyes on his face; "how tender you are of the comfort of your friend! To set matters right, I will tell you that if he comes here all will go well with him; if not, I can't say as much; it is quite true that the abbot is more displeased with him than with the rest of them, the soldiers who are going there have been told that in the castle are money and goods; so that he would better be wise, and choose the course that is for his own interests."

Here he was silent, as if he had nothing more to say, and did not wish anything more to be said to him; so that Ottorino, with a respectful bow, took his leave and departed.

About this time a messenger from Milan came to see the Count del Balzo, with whom he had a long secret interview; then he told his wife in a summary manner that they must return at once to the city, and the whole family soon began to busy themselves with preparations for departure. Ermelinda was stupefied at this unexpected resolve, but tried in vain to find out the reason of it.

A discussion then rose as to what route they should take. It was settled that they were to go by the small mountain paths by the Valessina to Canzo, Inverigo, and so on to Milan.

This route had its difficulties, not to speak of the risk the horses ran of injury up and down the uneven and ruinous bridle roads, and what was still worse, the chance of being robbed by the little country proprietors, for in those days every little squire who had half-a-dozen cutthroats in his pay, made war on his own account, and failing other methods, took to the highways, like Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo, mentioned by Dante.

The Count and his family set off at an early hour, with a train of about twenty persons. Beatrice, who felt, more than she had ever felt before, leaving for the first time in her life so many loved objects, turned her thoughts, with a joy mingled with dread, toward that future which she was approaching, and ever and anon cast back her eyes toward the old tower of her father's castle, as if to wish it farewell, having a strange presentiment that she should never see it again.

When our travelers arrived at the Bridge of Malpensata, over the Lambro, they met two Vassena fishermen, who on their return from Monza with the money produced by their week's fishing, had been robbed in that neighborhood. One of them, after relating his misfortune, told the Count he had had a letter for him in his doublet, which the robbers had carried off with the clothes.

"From whom was it?" asked the Count.

"I don't know," replied the fisherman; "but your falconer's son gave it to me in the Monza market-place."

"What! Was Lupo at Monza?"

"Yes; along with that knight, that handsome young man, who stayed so long at your castle."

Beatrice shuddered all over, but made no display of her distress; but when the cavalcade resumed its journey, she said to her mother, pointing to the two fishermen:

"Poor people! they have no bread for their children. Shall I give them something?"

"Do so, in God's name; it will be an act of real charity."

The young girl then took a piece of gold from her purse, and gave it to the one who had spoken to them.

"Divide it between you," she said, "and pray to God for us."

Ermelinda had upbraided her daughter for having gone out hunting against her wish, and the headstrong girl had answered with defiance. But she could not hold out long against Ermelinda's remonstrances, that were made more in sorrow than in anger, and the second day after Ottorino's departure she burst into tears, and told her how she had been induced to disobey her mother contrary to her intention, she could hardly say how it had happened; and at last she showed her the letter she had found between the pages of the Dante.

Ermelinda read it. In it Ottorino confessed that he had made some sort of promise of marriage to the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, but that he did not think he had gone so far as not to be able to withdraw honorably from the engagement. Henceforth, therefore, he was resolved to have no one but Beatrice, and he hoped she would excuse the liberty he had taken of writing to her before consulting her parents, assuring her that he would do so as soon as he knew that his suit was favored by herself.

Ermelinda promised her daughter most affectionately that she would do all in her power to please her; but warned her against being too confident, as it was possible that it would not be so easy as the young man thought to withdraw from the business, which had been concocted by Marco, who was of a haughty nature and unused to contradiction, and who, besides, had other grudges against their family. In short, she advised her to let her manage the affair, which the girl agreed to do, and promised implicit obedience.

Thus the mother's affection for her daughter was entirely restored, and now they were conversing on the journey as familiarly as usual.

But the Count, whose curiosity had been excited by the fishermen, began to wonder what could be the contents of the stolen letter.

"You may depend," he said, "there has been some disturbance at Milan, and Ottorino wished to advise me not to set foot there at present. But who knows?"

So saying, he ordered the calvacade to leave the direct road, and turned off to Monza, hoping to find Ottorino there, and to have some talk with him before coming to any definite conclusion.

CHAPTER IX

OTTORINO MAKES A PROPOSAL

THEY arrived at the Piazza di San Giovanni di Monza about vesper-tide, and found a large crowd assembled round a priest, who was preaching vigorously from a bench. The people, on seeing the approach of the cavalcade, left the preacher and swarmed round the newcomers to see who they were, whence they came, and whither they were going, so that our travelers soon found themselves the center of a crowd of curious questioners. Ermelinda, who saw the church was open, and wished to escape from the turmoil, said to her husband:

"We will wait inside the church while you are looking for Ottorino; but let us start again as soon as we can, so as to reach Milan, if possible, before nightfall."

"Do you mean to go into a church in time of interdict?" replied the Count; but this was said *sotto voce*, for, not knowing what opinions the rabble might have on that point, he did not care to take the risk of being insulted.

His wife, however, who made light of such scruples, took her daughter's arm, and beckoning to Lauretta, her mother Marianna, and the falconer, to come with them, they all passed through the crowd into the Church of San Giovanni.

They found the high altar decorated as usual; the lamps and candles were lighted, and the canons were singing in the choir as in ordinary times; for in Monza, as at Milan, the clergy were all for anti-Pope Nicholas

V, and as they considered John XXII to have been legally deposed, they did not care about his interdict.

Ermelinda hesitated for a moment about going in, fearing to incur excommunication for attending a service conducted by schismatic priests during the interdict.

"But," she said to herself, "I am only come here for shelter, as I would go to a house or under a portico."

So, without bowing to the altar or crossing herself, she sat down on a bench, with her daughter by her side.

At this, Lauretta's mother, being deeply imbued with the principles of another of her sons, called Bernardo, who had picked up a few fine phrases from a schismatic monk of San Ambrogio, was filled with indignation; she gave a tug to her daughter's gown who, seeing her betters sitting, wished to do the same, and made her kneel down by her side. She then cast a withering glance at her husband, who was standing with his hands behind his back, and amusing himself with contemplating the sibyls and prophets depicted on the cornice of the church; and, at last, unable longer to contain herself, she began muttering between her teeth:

"A nice way to go on in church! Just as if you were in a stable, more shame to you!"

"Be quiet, or the mistress will hear you," whispered Lauretta.

"I won't be quiet, so you had better cross yourself and say a prayer or two; and there's your father standing and staring like an owl at the ceiling!"

"Come, do have done with it," said the daughter; "say another prayer or two, if you like, but do not be long about it."

"I won't have done with it; it's a shame to see Christians stand about in church like that. If you had only heard what your brother said yesterday! I say if you had only heard it; but people don't want to listen."

Beatrice was all in a flutter; perhaps through hope or fear of finding herself so soon in company with Ottorino. Every time she heard the church-door open and shut behind her she thought it must be he, and felt her face grow crimson, and trembled all over. Hearing a noise as of approaching footsteps, she fancied she could distinguish between her father's step and the well-known one of somebody else; while her breathing became labored, and her heart felt as if it would have leaped out of her body. Meantime the persons she had heard coming had arrived, and brushed close by her as they passed on. It was not he—then she recovered her breath, and raised her head again, only, however, to renew her palpitations and tremblings every time she heard the door slam and saw other persons pass by her.

Just then the monotonous alternate chant of the priests in the choir was drowned by a tremendous clatter in the square outside. The people in the church turned round to listen, and some got up and went out. The canons were silent for a moment, till one of them came out and looked down the church, when, seeing all was quiet, he went back to the choir and the chanting was resumed. Suddenly the church doors were thrown open, and a huge wave of people, armed with sticks and stones, poured into the edifice with a tremendous roar.

At their head was the priest who had been preaching in the square; an emaciated old man, with long hair flying in the wind, holding a crucifix in his left hand and a sword in his right, who called out with a voice of thunder, that was heard far above the roar of the crowd: "Away, schismatics! away, children of Belial—priests of Moloch!" And the surging crowd took up the cry, shouting out: "Away, schismatics! away, heretics! out with you!" and rushed about breaking benches, throwing stones at the elaborate stained glass in the windows, tearing off the altar-cloths, and upsetting chandeliers and crucifixes. The high altar and its contents soon became an indistinguishable mass of ruin and devastation; while some of the madmen rushed into the choir, dragged the canons from the stalls, and drove them out with showers of kicks and cuffs. Some might be seen rolling down the altar-steps, others dragged along by the hair, whilst surplices, chasubles, birettas, and breviaries were flying about in all directions.

The person who had set the storm in motion, seeing his object was accomplished, got on a table, and began preaching afresh, praising the mob for their exploits, but exhorting them now to cease their work of destruction. However, his preaching was useless, for no one would listen to him, and the people kept running about the church as if it were a town taken by assault; and now the bolder spirits got into the sacristy, where they smashed in the wardrobe doors, and dragging out the church vestments and plate, they divided them among the clamorous crowd like common plunder.

Their ill-advised leader now rushed in: "My brethren," he cried, "ye have just accomplished a blessed work, why will ye mar it by sacrilege? put down those things at once."

"They are excommunicated as well," replied a wag, "we must drive them out of church:" whereat the mob began to cheer.

Here the preacher, seeing a sturdy young man fighting for the possession of a chalice, hidden under his cloak, confronted him, and cried out, "In the name of the spiritual and temporal power, set forth by this crucifix and this sword, I command thee, O most wicked man, to turn back."

But the man, giving him a blow in the face that made him spin round, rejoined, "And I, in the name of this authority here present, command thee to let me go on."

"So you have now got a taste of your two potentates, eh?" exclaimed another ruffian; on which the priest who had been struck became white with rage, and invoked the curse of Heaven in every form on those wretches, who let him go on for a while, but then overwhelmed him with blows, cuffs, and kicks, and at last drove him out of the church in a very sorry plight.

Meanwhile, another strange scene was enacting outside. Bernardo, the falconer's son, who had come from Limonta with the cavalcade, on first entering the gates of Monza, had stumbled upon an old acquaintance with whom he stayed behind for some time, so that when he got to the square of San Giovanni, he came in for the disturbance in the church. Seeing some priests running out of the church all torn and bleeding, he inquired the reason, and learned that they were the canons who had been driven out in that way for their obstinacy in carrying on the services in spite of the interdict. "What!" said he, "can a place that has always been for Nicholas Fifth, and the good cause, have been guilty so suddenly of such excesses?" He could not believe it was more than a momentary outbreak, which he had hopes of being able to appease. Blinded with indignation and self-confidence, he resolved on a course of action here that he never would have dreamed of at Limonta, where, as he said, all were a set of hardened schismatics, and where consequently there was no good to be done. So, dressed as he was in a cuirass over his doublet and a steel helmet overshadowing his pale, foolish countenance, he jumped on a bench, javelin in hand, and, looking like a scarecrow, began to harangue the mob.

This well-meaning fellow was just setting to work, when he saw, coming out of San Giovanni, the priest who had stirred up all this tempest and then was not man enough to calm it. Our friend Bernardo, meeting him in this wretched plight, and pursued by a yelling mob, thought he must be one of the canons who had been so maltreated; so leaving his bench, he went toward the wretched man and kissed his garments. One of the crowd, who saw the mistake, cried out that this priest was not a canon of Monza, but the very man who had brought all this ill-treatment on them. Bernardo drew back in dismay, exclaiming, "Then I have been kissing a venomous serpent whom I mistook for a dove."

"You are yourself a snake, a dragon, a basilisk," cried the priest in a louder key, "an abettor of schism and heresy."

So these two began to abuse each other to the utmost pitch of their voices, neither being willing to yield, while the populace laughed and cheered them on. At last, one of the rogues gave the falconer's son a tremendous push from behind, and threw him to the ground with his legs in the air, amid the yells and cheers of the spectators.

But now a voice was heard that stopped the clamor at once. "Make way there; let us pass." It was Ottorino, who had arrived on horseback with about thirty soldiers, in company with Count del Balzo.

At the approach of this cavalcade the rabble dispersed, scattering in all directions. Lupo, who was beside his master, soon recognized his brother and said to him, "Why don't you hold your tongue and keep quiet?"

"If you had come up a minute before," answered Bernardo, "you might have lent me your arm."

"You needed me rather to lend you some brains," replied Lupo.

Ottorino, with his followers, had entered the church, and galloping up and down the aisles, and in and out of the chapels, by dint of frequent blows with the flat of their swords and the butt-end of their lances, they drove out the plundering mob that had taken possession of the place.

Our ladies, whom we left in the church when the first wave of people entered, had taken refuge in a chapel, and the active falconer had fastened the bolts to ensure their safety while the church was being sacked. Now and then one of the mob would come swaggering up, and try to make them open the chapel gates, but Ambrose drew his rapier and applied it freely to the hands of all whom he could not persuade to go away quietly. At the same time he told his daughter to remove from the altar the candlesticks and crucifix, and everything that could tempt the mob to break into their place of refuge, and Lauretta promptly obeyed, in spite of her mother's protestations, who would rather have suffered martyrdom than take part in such profanation.

Here they remained for a while, until, by good luck, some of the Count's suite, who had got into the church, caught side of the ladies, and stationed themselves in front of the chapel gates, with their swords drawn, at the sight of which the plunderers did not care to attack them further.

The Count and his family and suite now pursued their journey to Milan; and Ottorino, who had nothing more to do at Monza, proposed, as was natural, to accompany them.

"I assure you that I have not written you any other letter than the one you received at Limonta by my servant," said the young knight to the father of Beatrice, as he rode beside him.

"And yet," replied the Count, "those fishermen of Vassena declared, as I told you, that they had a letter of yours given them by Lupo in the market-place of Monza."

Lupo was summoned, and owned that he had sent the letter himself to warn his father to secure his own safety; he had got it written by a priest of his acquaintance at Monza, and had given it to the two fishermen.

"Ah! now I understand," said the Count; and continued conversing with the young knight in an undertone.

"Tell me," he asked him, "what was it you wrote to me? that the Abbot of San Ambrogio"—

"He is quite beside himself;" said Ottorino, "and I have just heard at Monza that to-night, at Lecco, the sixty lancers are to embark whom he is sending to exterminate the poor Limontese."

"Mercy on us! but what have I to do with it? It was not my fault that those pig-headed hill-folk would not submit to their lord!"

"What would you have me say? The Cardinal seems to be against you."

"Oh, what bad luck! I have done nothing, I tell you again. They say I protected them. I tell you that I have never betrayed one word of your letter, and have never repeated what your messenger said."

"Do you mean that they know nothing at Limonta of their peril?"

"Nothing whatever."

"If so, we must at once send off to inform them," said the youth.

"For pity's sake, forbear! If they catch a messenger on his way down there we shall never get it out of the Cardinal's head that I've sent him, and as he already suspects me"—

But Ottorino, without listening to him, said to his squire:

"It is only proper that you should go off at once to Limonta to warn your fellow country-people of the storm about to break on them; so turn back at once, find a fresh horse at Monza, and go."

"No, no," interrupted the Count, "you will ruin me. The abbot knows that Lupo is the son of my servant."

"He is my squire," answered Ottorino; "so I take it on myself."

"But think for a moment," continued the Count. "By this time they know all."

"Did you not tell me that they guess nothing?"

"That is to say—I cannot be sure—but most likely they have been warned from Lecco. Oh, they must have been; I'll warrant they have been."

"At all events, it is better to make sure of it," replied the young knight.

"It is so dark for poor Lupo, among all those precipices," the Count went on urging.

"Do not let that enter your head," said the falconer's son. "I will leave the horse at the first cottage when night overtakes me, and will go on afoot. It will only be a dozen miles for me to trot, and as it concerns the lives of these poor people, that is nothing," and so saying, he turned his horse round, and galloped away.

Then Ottorino, approaching Ermelinda, told her what had just happened, and explained to her the cause of Lupo's sudden departure. He afterward tried to turn the conversation to her daughter, so as to oblige her to take part in it; but Beatrice would neither open her lips nor turn her eyes toward him. Her mother also, after she had listened to everything concerning Limonta, appeared to wish to end the conversation, and answered as shortly and coldly as common civility would permit.

The young man, discouraged by this behavior, fell a prey to many confused suspicions.

"Could Beatrice not have received my letter? can she disdain my love? does not the connection please her mother? can they have arranged another match for her?"

In order to settle these doubts as soon as possible, he drew the Count away from the rest of the party, and began with much courtesy to speak to him of his daughter, and gradually led up to the point of a direct offer of marriage. The father of the young lady began a speech full of eulogiums on the family and person of the youth; but at the end began to stammer out that he would not on any account give offence to Marco, who, as he had been told by his wife, was arranging another marriage.

Ottorino answered that he was confident of the approval of Marco, who in the affair only wished his good, but that in any case he was his own master, and for all the respect he owed his leader, he was neither his vassal nor his son, and could marry whomsoever he wished, whether Marco was willing or not.

On hearing this the Count made a grimace, which meant, "My dear friend, you may do as you like, but I do not wish, for my part, to break my head by ramming it against a stone wall." With his lips, however, he only replied in this way, "Well, we will speak of it again presently, when more at leisure."

But the youth, who perceived the untoward impression left by his last words, tried quickly to rectify it, and declared that when Marco was made aware that she for whom Ottorino was ready to take all risks was the daughter of Count Oldrado del Balzo, he would not dream of any opposition. He also proceeded to relate how Visconti had asked for him, and manifested a great desire to see him at Milan, where matters appeared to be turning in favor of Pope John XXII. In the end he left the Count with a notion that Marco attributed a great part of the credit which he had obtained to the influence of the Count.

I need not say that the effect of these words was to make our friend still more vain and conceited, if possible.

"I must say," replied the Count, at last, "that Marco does me more honor than I deserve; but, as I told you before, we were friends from boyhood. At any rate, if I am of any value I am here entirely for his sake. And as to what relates to Beatrice, I say again, that if there are no objections on his part, I will promise her to you at once, and think myself lucky to marry her in so honorable a manner, and so much after my own heart, for you know how fond I am of you, and how anxious I am for your welfare; and as for Ermelinda, she is just the same, and will, I know, rejoice greatly."

The party arrived in time at Milan: the Count turned off to dismount at the Brera del Guercio, where his house was, and the young knight went straight to Marco Visconti.

CHAPTER X

THE BANQUET

AS soon as Marco saw Ottorino enter the room, where he sat alone reading some papers, he rose, and hastened cordially to meet him. "Already returned!" he said, "and how go affairs at Monza?"

There is universal discontent," answered the youth; "but no one dares to stir a finger for fear of the Duke of Tech."

"Whom, then, did you communicate with?" said Marco.

"With the heads of the Guelph party, whom you mentioned to me, such as Guzino Gavazza, Moneghino Zeva, and Berusio Rabbia; the latter, as soon as he can, without being suspected, will come to Milan to confer with you."

"And what news can you give me of the populace?"

"The worst possible: I must tell you of your priest, Martino, whom you sent there as a missionary; it was only by a miracle that he escaped alive from the claws of those worthies, whom he had begun to instruct."

"Are they so mad for the anti-Pope, Niccolo?"

"It is not that they care more for Niccolo than Giovanni; they are a lawless set, who care only to fish in troubled waters;" and here Ottorino related all that had happened in the church of Monza.

"Brutes!" said Marco, smiling at the account of their valiant deeds. "Brutes! but it is always the same everywhere; well, enough of that. My cue is first to entangle matters thoroughly, and then we can set them right again after a time. And now for poor Martino"—

"I give you my word that he has lost all wish to preach, and that he will bear the marks of his adventures for a time."

"To say the truth," said Marco, "he has played his part rather stupidly; but one need not live to be a hundred to know that when the mob rises they are like wild beasts, and that they will lay their hands on what they can get. Let them alone. After all, there is no very great harm that there should fall into the pockets of poor folk, in the shape of gold pieces, some of that gold and silver which is always being heaped up in the sacristies in the shape of candelabra and crucifixes. Why cannot we be good Christians, and, at the same time, have lamps made of glass or of earthenware, and crosses and candlesticks of wood? And, after all, where has all this gold and silver come from, I ask you? why, out of the pockets of the poor. The only thing that really matters is, whether they are not too much attached to the schismatic side?"

"As to that, you may be at ease, for in my opinion they know nothing about either Pope or anti-Pope; and to prove it, after ill-treating poor Martino, who was preaching for Giovanni against Niccolo, they began to do the same to a second orator, who raised his voice for Niccolo against Giovanni. He was a mountaineer, who had come from Limonta with Count del Balzo, and if I had not come up in time, there would soon have been an end of him."

"And has Count del Balzo arrived?"

"We arrived together, just now."

"You see that the advice I suggested to you has had the right effect: now that he is here, it will be my fault if we don't turn him to account; we must begin—let me see—he has all his family with him, has he not?"

"Yes, all the family."

"To-morrow I shall give my friends a banquet; can you not arrange to bring him with you? Ermelinda—I certainly cannot hope to see her; but—this Beatrice, whom you rave about, you may be able to persuade her to keep her father company."

Ottorino, who could have asked for nothing better, since it was clear that if his patron was so eager to see his ladylove, he would pardon him without hesitation for throwing over Rusconi's daughter, promised at once to obey him implicitly.

The next morning, early, he went to the Count to tell him that Marco expected to see him and Beatrice at dinner, and that he must let her go, for it was a great feather in his cap, and a favor that would greatly increase his reputation in Milan, and in a word, that there was no way out of it.

Ermelinda, to whom the Count announced this matter as a settled affair, saw no way of opposing it. The girl might fairly be called Ottorino's betrothed, as he had formally demanded her hand; and it was only natural and proper that the young man should wish to introduce her to his patron to gain his consent to the alliance, as it was very important that the former engagement, in which Marco had a hand, should not be broken off without his full consent. But she could not help feeling a secret dread, derived from memories of the past and forebodings for the future, at the idea of her daughter being presented to Marco; and when she finally gave her leave to Beatrice, who was also a good deal alarmed from all she had heard of that personage, she felt that she was sealing irrevocably her daughter's future destiny; and when she saw her set out, her eyes filled with tears.

Marco Visconti was standing in one of the reception rooms of his palace, in the midst of a circle of the flower of Milanese knighthood, awaiting the announcement of dinner. Ever magnificent in his entertainments to his friends and fellow nobles, on this occasion he had pushed things almost to prodigality in order to attract partisans, and to flaunt his wealth before the eyes of the crowd, so easily dazzled by all that glistens.

One of the chief personages in his following was Lodrisio Visconti, brother of the usurping Abbot of San Ambrogio, Marco's most trusted counselor, and his instigator in the many secret transactions in which he had been concerned. He was a fine-looking, powerful man of about forty, but a turbulent, restless spirit, who, although he had been hitherto well spoken of, yet was destined to acquire a very disreputable celebrity. He had long hated Ottorino, from jealousy of seeing him beloved by Marco, over whose spirit he wished to rule alone, and also on account of certain lawsuits he had had with the young knight, relatives though they were, relating to the succession to the fief of Castelletto, on the Ticino, which had at last been adjudged to Ottorino. Marco had sought to reconcile them: and lately they had seemed to be on better terms. Lodrisio, however, had not laid aside his old ill-feeling, and was always on the watch to take advantage of an opportunity to ruin his rival.

A page now announced the arrival of Count del Balzo; all eyes turned to the door, and he was seen to enter holding his daughter's hand. Marco hastened to meet them quite agitated; for at the first sight of Beatrice, who came forward with her eyes cast down, and deeply blushing, he imagined that he saw her mother, Ermelinda, herself again, and his heart for a moment stood still.

He gave no sign of his feelings; received the father with courtesy, but with a dignified mien, which, though cordial, could not fail of inspiring respect, and to the daughter he paid every honor that was due to a noble damsel, entertaining her with gay talk till the pages entered to announce that the tables were ready. They then passed into an adjoining hall, where Marco placed Beatrice on his right, and Count del Balzo on his other side, and all the party took their places round the table.

Toward the end of dinner, twelve valets in doublets and parti-colored red and white hosen entered the hall, bearing the gifts of the festival. Some held braces of greyhounds, setters, or bloodhounds, with collars of quilted velvet, with couplers and leashes of stamped leather. Another bore on his fist splendid hawks of different kinds, trained for the chase, with red jesses, white straps and caps embroidered with pearls, and little bells and silver ornaments on their breasts, engraved with the serpent crest. Another had a golden-hilted sword; another a steel helmet: while others bore aloft mantles and surcoats of embroidered damask, with silken cords, choice pearl buttons, and golden tassels.

When these pages approached with the presents, Marco perceived that there was nothing fit to be presented to a young lady of noble birth, so he made a sign to one of his squires, who left the hall for a moment, and then reappeared, bearing a coronet of pearls on a salver. Then the master of the feast stood up, and taking the coronet in both his hands, bent one knee before Beatrice, and then rising, placed the chaplet gently on her head, saying, "God save the Queen of the Feast," and all the guests responded with a shout of applause.

This done, he begged the maiden to condescend, to use his own words, to lend a grace to these poor gifts of his, by presenting them with her own hands to the knights and barons who had honored him with their company. Beatrice then stood up, and all the guests followed her example. Marco himself, acting as her squire, led her round the different tables, and as he received them from the hands of the pages, handed her the presents, one by one, which she, with a graceful gesture, presented to each in turn, while the recipient welcomed the gift on bended knee, kissing the hem of the fair donor's garment. To Ottorino's lot fell a steel helmet with an enameled crest, and it was remarked that the hand of the beautiful queen trembled more than usual when she offered it to him; but it was supposed that the weight of the armor was too much for the delicate wrist of a young girl.

The last to receive a present was Count del Balzo, for whom Marco had reserved a superb peregrin falcon. He, too, received it on bended knee from the hands of his daughter, and kissed the hem of her garment like the rest; but on rising, he could not restrain the warmth of his paternal affection, and throwing his arms round her neck, kissed her forehead, saying, "God bless thee, my daughter!" at which another loud cheer rang through the hall.

When quiet was restored, Marco said to the damsel:

"Most lovely and courteous queen, must I be the only one among all your subjects who has to go without one of your favors? If it is not too much to ask for, might I hope to receive from your hands a ribbon, or any trifle, as a sign that you have accepted me for your vassal?"

The maiden became quite confused, and almost frightened; but her father said to her:

"Quick, take something off at once—one of those bracelets."

She obeyed; and drew off her left wrist a silk armlet embroidered with gold, which Marco received from her hands on his knees.

When the tables had been cleared, the company divided into different groups, and began discussing the news of the day. The conversation turning on the Pope and anti-Pope, Count del Balzo soon monopolized the subject, and took the opportunity to air his Latin and to display all the ecclesiastical lore he had in his head; and those young knights, who could talk of little else than the merits of their swords and horses, were struck dumb by his extraordinary learning.

Soon the talk was of a tournament which was announced that day to celebrate the election of Azzone Visconti as Imperial Viceroy. After many inquiries had been made and answered, Lodrisio drew a sheet of parchment from his breast.

"Here," he said, "is the proclamation as it has been set forth by the town-crier."

The guests all crowded round him, and he began to read:—

"'Oyez, Oyez, princes, lords, and gentlemen—I declare to you the great, worthy, and noble contest of arms, the high festival and joust, which will be held at Milan, in Lombardy, a month from the date of these presents. To fly from sloth, to exercise our own persons, and to acquire honor in the military calling and the favor of the most lovely and high-born ladies whose servants we are, and, at the same time, to display the prowess of the city and the country, by reason of the institution of the magnificent and illustrious Azzone Visconti to the office of Imperial Viceroy, we, the undersigned noble knights, have undertaken to hold a combat and joust; whereat we will hold ourselves ready from sunrise to sunset to accept the challenge of any knight, whether native or foreign, who can show a proper qualification.

"'RULES OF THE TOURNAMENT.

"'*First assault*—On horseback in the lists, each knight to have four challenges with his lance, and one for his lady.

"'*Second assault*—Sword attack on horseback singly, in pairs, or all together, according to the good pleasure of the judges.

"'The armorers will furnish lances of equal length, and swords at the option of the combatants. If any strike a horse he shall be put out of the lists. Whoever breaks most lances, and does best, will have the prize of a suit of armor.

" 'The combatants will be required to touch one or more of the shields suspended at the upper end of the lists at their option, or the whole number if they choose to do so, and they will find a herald to receive them and to enroll their names.

" 'The combatants will be also required either to bring themselves, or to send by a squire to the said herald their shields, engraved with their proper coat-of-arms, to be suspended before the beginning of the joust, in the place above mentioned, and in case they are not hung up by the time appointed, they will not be received without the special consent of the managers and of His Excellency the Imperial Viceroy.

" 'In witness whereof we have hereto subscribed our names.' " Here the reader stopped.

"But how about the signatures?" cried several at once. "Let us see them."

"Well, here they are, then: 'Sacramoro Liprando, Ottorino Visconti, Bronzin Caimo, Pinala, Bertone Cacatossici, Pietro Meraviglia, Un Tanzo, Due Biraghi, Due Bossi, Lorenzuolo da Landriano.

" 'Given at Milan, in Lombardy, Anno Domini 1329. Month ——, day ——.' "

The Count del Balzo, who, during the whole time of the banquet, had been utterly cowed by the innate stateliness of the aspect and demeanor of Marco, had done little else than return a few incoherent answers to the questions put to him from time to time by the master of the house. But now that he was no longer near him, and had, so to speak, passed out of the orbit of his influence, he felt inspirited again by the honor done to his daughter, and by the attention with which his first discourse had been listened to; so not being able to restrain himself any longer, as soon as he perceived that the reading of the proclamation was finished, he poked his head into the circle of young men who had been listening to it, and said: "So you are talking now of tournaments and jousts, are you?" in that form of interrogation which does not require an answer, and which is only a pretext for joining in a conversation already begun. "Do you know what the word joust means? Well, I'll tell you. Joust comes from *juxta,* the Latin for near, because it is a fight in which the combatants come close together."

"And who will be the judges of the lists?" asked one of the party, who did not seem to care much about this display of learning.

But the Count, without allowing time for the answer, went chattering on:

"You see, too, the custom of jousting is very ancient indeed; it dates from the time of the Trojan War, and came again into fashion at the time of King Arthur and the Round Table, and this is why we call it *Trojae ludus,* which means to say, the game of Troy, and also the War of Troy, because the Romans called war *ludus,* as if it had been a game."

No one spoke, but the orator could not help perceiving from the looks and demeanor of his hearers that they did not take much pleasure in the study of etymology, and that therefore he had better change his subject; so he began to talk learnedly about arms and warfare, a subject to which the conversation seemed tending.

Marco had never stirred from Beatrice's side, with whom he conversed with easy cordiality. When, as it grew late, her father came to take a hearty and grateful farewell, he accompanied the damsel to the limits of the hall, where, leaving her in the Count's charge, he praised her to him inordinately, and made him a profusion of compliments, ending with saying that for the future he hoped their frequent meetings would atone for the length of time they had been separated.

The Count left the palace in such high spirits that his feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. As soon as he arrived at home, he told his wife of the high honors that had been paid him and his daughter, and Ermelinda was much satisfied with the account, feeling sure that Ottorino had spoken about his intended marriage with Beatrice to Marco, and that the politeness shown by the latter to the Count and his daughter had been intended as a mark of his approval.

Soon afterward Ottorino himself arrived, in a high state of delight. The conversation turning on the festivities of the day, he saw that the Count and Countess both considered that Marco had, in fact, given his consent, and he did not care to undeceive them. After the welcome he had received he thought himself sure of success, so he determined, the first opportunity he had of being alone with his liege lord, to do what he had been ashamed of doing before so large an assembly. He proceeded therefore to talk about his future nuptials with Beatrice's parents as if it were a settled affair, and, in fact, it took very few words to arrange everything.

The Count here made a sign to his wife, and then turning to Beatrice, who during the whole interview had remained silent, and had not even dared to raise her head, he said:

"We have all been reckoning without our host; we have been giving you away without asking your leave, when, perhaps, after all, all this nonsense is the last thing you are thinking of."

Beatrice on this felt her cheeks glow like a hot coal. She took her mother's hand, but did not answer a syllable.

Ermelinda made a sign to the Count to stop his jesting; and then said to Ottorino, with a smile:

"Though this kind of thing cannot usually be done by proxy, yet I hope you will be content with the 'yes' that her mother now gives you in her behalf."

The young knight then rose to take leave, on which the girl raised her head, and without letting go her mother's hand, said to him—

"You will come to-morrow, won't you?"

"Ha! ha! Now the cat is let out of the bag," said the Count, roaring with laughter; "now we see you in your true light! A minute ago you might have been a Santa Lucia. Oh, you little puss!"

Ottorino then went away in a state of great delight, which was thoroughly shared by those he left behind him.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE AND SORROW

A SILVER lamp, with three branches, burned in Marco Visconti's private chamber, and diffused a sweet perfume over the room. Lodrisio, seated on a faldstool, with one elbow leaning on a small table, and his chin resting on his hand, was conversing with the master of the house, who was listening with a distracted air.

"Of one thing we may be quite certain," said the astute counselor, "the Duke of Monteforte has got hold of the twenty-five thousand florins that Louis of Bavaria has ordered your nephew, Azzone, to pay him to-day; and to-morrow he will set out for the Tyrol with his German bodyguard, so as to get out of the way. The Emperor is waiting for him in Tuscany, expecting the money, and, my life for it, a pretty fool the dried-up old stick will look when he finds his Count has flown! But see what a master stroke it is to get rid of those fellows for a bit! Our schemes would not stand a chance of success unless that burden was off our backs!"

"Quite so," said Marco, listlessly.

"All the same," rejoined the other; "you were right in what you said this morning, that the plot is not yet ripe, and that the priests and friars sent by the Pope must have time allowed them to produce the requisite effect; and we must wait till the Bavarian is more thoroughly drained of men and money, which process is going on every day. By-the-by, do you know, cousin, that the eight hundred German cavalry, who, we heard, had deserted their colors because their pay was not forthcoming, have intrenched themselves in the Castle of Ceruglio, in the Val di Nievole? Don't they know about it in the Viceregal Palace?"

Marco, whose head was turned in another direction, heard these last sentences like a man half-awake, and pretending that he had been listening all the time, he answered—

"Oh, to be sure, those troops at Ceruglio—eh?"

"Yes," said the other, "have your brothers and the Viceroy heard anything about them?"

"They have been told about it by the Bavarian himself," replied Marco, "and the Emperor is trying to work upon my nephew, in order to get the investiture fees, with which he hoped to restore those rebellious troops to their allegiance."

"Oh, how ingenious! Precious few of them he will get hold of by that means, at any rate."

"And do you know," continued Marco, "what Azzone wishes to do? Can you believe it? To send *me* to Ceruglio instead of the money!"

"What!"

"Why, he wishes me to go as hostage to the rebels, to keep them quiet while he scrapes enough money together to pay them."

"What a dear boy!" said Lodrisio, with a grin.

"Isn't he? And this very morning he has been plaguing me again, saying that I was their only hope in this affair; that no one but myself could get him out of the mess, as those Germans knew me, and would trust my word; and then he talked of my various exploits."

"Your exploits—eh? You may tell him he has not yet seen the best of them. However, he is not such a fool as he looks. Anyone can see he wishes to get you away, as he feels that your reputation throws him into the shade."

Marco smiled, and said, "Do you know what has come into my head in thinking over all this?"

"Pray tell me."

"Why, to catch him in his own toils. I will go myself to the Val di Nievole, and gain over to my side those eight hundred lancers, every one of whom would go through fire and water for me (my nephew was not wrong there) by paying them their arrears with my own money. I shall leave you here ready for action, and when the Bavarian comes to set that creature of his on his feet, I will swoop down upon him with my eight hundred spearmen from Ceruglio and the Tuscan contingent, which I shall have got together in the mean time."

Lodrisio sprang up, exclaiming, "Cousin, this plan is worth its weight in gold; we'll make our friend look foolish before we have done with it."

"That's enough; we will talk the matter over more carefully presently," said Marco. "I should not wonder if we were to make something out of it. But I am not much in the humor for going into it any more to-night. So good-by till to-morrow."

"Farewell, then," answered Lodrisio, and departed.

Marco, when left alone, spent some time in walking up and down the room in an excited manner, and then said, in a loud and decided voice, "I must now write to the Florentine Government."

He then unbuckled his sword, and hung it against the wall, approached the table, took a sheet of parchment, and began to write:

"Nobilibus dominis, sapientibus, etc., et Comuni Florentiæ, amicis diligendis precipue, Marcus Vicecomes cum sincera dilectione, salutem." When he had come to this point, he leaned back and gazed at the ceiling, thinking how he should begin his letter; but after remaining in this position some time he had received no inspiration, and the letter made no progress.

At last he took up a great mass of manuscript, and, throwing it roughly behind his chair, sprang to his feet, and striking his forehead with his hand, began afresh to pace the room, talking to himself all the time.

"But did not I know before that she was like Ermelinda? Did not Ottorino tell me so, both verbally and by letter, twenty times over? What an idiot I have been! The voice, too, hers exactly! and the smile, the figure, the expression of the eyes! Poor little dove! at the first sight of her, at the sound of her voice, I seemed to live over again my early years, my years of hope! Oh! how far off they seem! The poison breath of evil had not then tainted my heart—at Ermelinda's side everything seemed smiling, I saw a friend in every one—and afterward? What troubles and what base ingratitude I have met with! And I also got involved in that slough of despond; I also got drunk with blood! and yet I feel as if I were born for something better. Beatrice! it is a lovely name!

"And are you the same Marco in whose hands lies the future of all Italy—you, who are hardened by so many years of bitterness, by such lengthened and severe trials, and on the very threshold of that great dark future to which you are boldly advancing, do you allow yourself to rave about a mere girl? What would that cynic Lodrisio say to it? Away, foolish vapors, and let my star shine forth again with its accustomed splendor!"

So saying, he resumed his unfinished letter, and filled four closely-written pages; after which he retired to rest, with his brain full of Guelphs and Ghibellines, of Pope and Emperor, of intrigues and war.

A few days later, Ottorino, returning from Pavia, where he had been sent to negotiate with certain conspirators, came to his chief, having made up his mind to ask point-blank for his consent to take Beatrice as his wife; but when they met he found him looking so morose and severe that his resolution failed him. The young knight first explained all that related to the affairs for which he had been despatched, and then, the better to lead up to what he wished to say on his own account, he began to talk about the Count del Balzo, taking his cue from a dispute the Count had had lately with a friar about the illegality of the deposition of Pope Giovanni; the result being that the friar had given in to the arguments of the Count, who had thus made a great hit.

Marco laughed to himself at hearing of an affair which he had himself carefully arranged some time before. As soon as the Count del Balzo arrived at Milan, Marco, wishing to use him for his own purposes, had arranged that his house should be frequented by divers well-known military leaders and learned men, who discussed there the various controversies of the day; and in order not to leave him with no weapons but his own, which were not altogether of the finest temper, he had secretly provided some valiant champions, among whom was our old acquaintance, the advocate of the Limontese; and these worthies came gallantly to the aid of the master of the house whenever they saw that he was getting the worst of the argument.

The conversions to his opinions were for the most part the result, not of the eloquence of the orator, but of another eloquence, stronger and more impressive, which was derived from the news from Tuscany, to the effect that the cause of the anti-Pope Pietro da Corvaria was hopeless, while that of Pope Giovanni was gaining ground every day. Another kind of argument came out of Marco's coffers, which were well supplied with money, and always open. And then after this transaction, the convert, if he were a person of any reputation for learning, was admitted to Balzo's house, and there, after disputing a little with the host in favor of opinions already renounced, he would show himself ready to yield to the force of his opponent's arguments, the weight of his example drawing after him his more ignorant brethren.

Ottorino mentioned the Count for the sole purpose of leading up to his daughter, and now had no sooner finished his description of the conversion of the friar, than he observed a covert smile on the countenance of Marco, who was not displeased to see how well his artifice had succeeded. At this the young knight took heart of grace; but Marco, whose brow was soon again overcast, said with an air of ill-concealed displeasure:

"How's this? When I believed that you were busy with your harum-scarum companions, I find you settled down among the doctors, disputing with them about Popes and Church-law?"

"But you must remember," replied Ottorino, "the Count has only just come to Milan. I am not ungrateful to him for all his kindness, and—to tell the exact truth—to his family also"— But he stopped short, seeing a dark cloud as of anger gathering on his listener's face. "I am in bad luck," he said to himself.

He then tried to turn the conversation, but in an embarrassed manner.

Marco let him run on, observing silently his agitated demeanor and incoherent words, and fixed on him a penetrating glance. At last the young man was relieved from his difficulty by the appearance of a page, who announced that the Abbot of San Ambrogio was waiting without.

"Let him come in," said the master; and Ottorino took his leave.

Thenceforth he spent most of his time at the side of his lady-love, talking of his devotion to her, and his hopes, and also of those delightful days when they were together at Limonta, recalling especially to her memory the day of the famous shipwreck, and that of the hawking party; playfully requiring her to explain the coldness with which she had so often tormented him. Everything now, however, ended happily; for either by a gentle remark smilingly made by Beatrice's mother, or by a broken word or a shy blush from her, the enamored boy acquired the certainty of being first in the heart of his mistress.

On one of these days he received an invitation from his chief to accompany him on a riding-party through the city; and out of a numerous troop of knights, he was selected by Marco for the honor of riding by his side. Marco, responding as he rode to the acclamations of the people who crowded at the windows, on the terraces, and in the streets to see him pass, treated his cousin in the most affectionate manner.

"Listen to me, cousin," he said, "I must go very soon into Tuscany, and you shall accompany me."

The youth answered, hesitating:

"You are most kind, but—just at this time"—

"What! Is there anything you have more at heart than your chief at this time?"

"No."

"But what is it?"

"I am to be one of the managers of the tournament, and my name is on the proclamation."

"If that is all, it can be arranged easily. My court is not so badly stocked that we cannot find a knight to take your place. I understand you," he continued, forcing a smile; "and suppose I guess why this sudden departure annoys you. It is because Franchino Rusconi is to arrive so soon at Milan with his daughter. But cheer up, for this once duty shall not interfere with love. Before setting out you and she shall be betrothed."

Ottorino saw that he must explain himself decidedly, so he began:

"I cannot bear displeasing you, but I implore you, by the fidelity with which I have always followed you"—

"And what is this preamble to lead to?" said Marco, roughly cutting his words short. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Indeed, I never have pledged my faith to Franchino's daughter. It was only a castle in the air; and I think I am still perfectly free."

By this time the cavalcade was passing in front of the palace of the Count del Balzo. Marco and Ottorino raised their eyes at the same time toward an open gallery, where the father and daughter were looking on. After they had passed, the young man tried to renew the interrupted conversation, but his lord, with a stern look, signed to him to fall behind, after which he dropped the reins on his charger's neck, and urged it at full speed as far as the courtyard of his palace, where he dismounted, went upstairs without saying a word, and was not seen again that day.

We must now turn back as far as Limonta, where we left some of our friends, on whom the storm was about to burst. I allude to the sixty free lances under the command of Bellebuono, who were coming to spread havoc throughout the district.

While these freebooters, leaving in the evening the shore of Lecco, were sailing quietly along with rapine and murder in their hearts; and while Lupo, on the other hand, was rushing at break-neck speed to warn the threatened people, the Limontese, had gone home as usual to attend to their ordinary evening business.

The cottage of the boatman—father to the man that was drowned—was on the other side of the town, looking toward the north. All that could be seen of it from the lake was a portion of the thatched roof, with a wooden cross on the top, the rest being concealed by two aged chestnuts. The interior consisted of one room, with a mud floor, a railed-off dais, and the walls all begrimed with smoke. In one corner was a truckle-bed, concealed under a thick, rough coverlet (called a catalana, from

Catalonia, where such articles were made). This had been the resting-place of poor Arigozzo, and at that moment a water-spaniel, so lately his faithful companion, was sleeping on it.

About two yards from the foot of the bed stood a massive chest full of earth, inside which, according to the ordinary usage at that time all over Europe (as chimneys had only just been invented) the fire was made, on which was placed a boiling-pot on a tripod. Before the fire, and toward the middle of the room, was a beechen table, while the rest of the furniture consisted of four straw-bottomed chairs, half-a-dozen oars, a small rack fastened by pegs to the wall, filled with three rows of plates, three earthen porringers, and three brass spoons as bright as gold, a chest, a three-pronged fork, and a net made of twigs.

Near the table, beneath an iron lamp, old Marta, mother of the drowned man, sat spinning. Her countenance, formerly so serene, was now darkened by a recent and unaccustomed sorrow.

From time to time she turned her eyes to that small bed, and then raised them to heaven, as if praying the Lord to take her to himself and re-unite her to her dear Arigozzo.

Michael, with his back turned to the table, was sitting near the fire, bending over it, and stirring with a ladle some millet and milk porridge. He kept his back turned to his wife, to prevent her maternal sorrow from increasing his own.

A half-hour afterward the woman rose to her feet, took her distaff, went to the fire, and took down the pot; and then approaching the rack, still absorbed in her devotions, her eye fell on the three porringers; she took them out mechanically, and in her pre-occupation repeating the actions she had been accustomed to for so many years, she placed all three on a table, put a spoon at the side of each, poured out the food, and called out, "Michael, come to supper." But as the husband was approaching the table the wife perceived that she had placed one trencher too many, and therefore seized hastily one of the three porringers and put in on the ground, pretending to have filled it for the dog. But the husband noticed that third spoon which still remained in its usual place, and guessing the loving forgetfulness of the mother, turned his face aside to hide his emotion, and after taking up his plate and spoon, he went back to his former place.

Marta bent her head down on her chest, took a moment to compose herself, and then called the spaniel by his name.

The dog thanked the good woman in his own way for this unaccustomed attention with a low howl, that was almost like a human groan, and at last put his nose to the plate, licked it for an instant, and then sprang again on the bed, and crouched down quietly as before. "See, this poor beast wants to die like him," said the old woman to herself. She sat down, crossed herself, and began to eat, but she could hardly swallow.

Then she saw that the bowl her husband had put down was almost as full as before, so she took it up, and going up to him said, "Michael, cheer up and eat, for God's sake; you'll never last out, if you behave like this: all day long you eat nothing." The boatman, without answering, roughly moved away, and she continued sadly: "Come, eat something at least. Do you wish to die of starvation? You ought to feel it your duty to take care of yourself, if it was only for my sake, for what should I do without you?" and then a burst of tears choked her utterance.

"Will you never have done with your weeping?" the boatman cried out: "all day long you are at it! What can I do? I can't bring him to life again. By my soul, I can't bear it much longer!"

The poor old woman drove back the bitter tears, wiped her eyes on her apron, and returned to her spinning.

At last the boatman got up, and coming near his wife he touched her, and seemed to be about to say something to cheer her, as if he had wished to make up for his roughness; but in the end, he only said:

"Well, Marta, I will do as you would have me, I will eat to please you," and began to eat. "Look here, Marta," he went on after a time, "to-morrow I must take the Syndic of the district to Dervio; so with the money he gives me we will have a mass said for the boy, and it shall be at Lugano, where there is no interdict."

"I have already had a mass said," answered the wife, and pointing to the distaff full: "Do you see that wool?" she said; "it is for the priest of Lugano; the spinning pays the price of the mass."

CHAPTER XII

A DARK PLOT

THE hour was late; nothing was to be heard but the low murmur of the lake, drowned from time to time by the rustling of the wind among the branches of the chestnut-trees overshadowing the boatman's cottage, when suddenly the dog raised his head, pricked up his ears and began to growl, then leaped down and ran toward the door, barking violently. The husband unfastened the door and went out, and then heard, far away to the right, toward Limonta, the baying of another hound, the fisherman's dog. He then climbed a rock behind his hut, and looking toward the town he saw the sky on that side quite red, and the higher cliffs reflecting a changing light, which ran along like a streak of flame.

"A fire at Limonta!" he cried, and hastened off.

"Take care of yourself!" his wife called after him.

Michael heard on his way shouts that came from the town, and soon afterward other cries from many parts—from the mountain-side, and then from the shore. By degrees, as the different sounds gathered strength, they became blended in one long continued roar.

At last he reached a height from which he ascertained that the fire had not been caused accidentally, for he saw two houses burning at the opposite ends of the village. He distinguished loud voices raised in anger and blasphemy; he fixed his eyes intently on the churchyard, and in the midst of the tumult, he perceived a gleam as of armor and spears.

The conflagration increased—in a moment it seemed as if the whole country was in flames. The lake seemed on fire, and boats might be seen leaving its shores with vigorous strokes.

While he was standing there, he at last heard some living creature approaching; he drew behind the trunk of an old olive-tree, and by the light which the flames threw even to that distance, he saw a woman advancing with a child in her arms, a little girl hanging to her apron, and dragging behind her a small cow. The stubborn beast was continually turning round to look toward the village. Then might be heard at various distances, and in various directions, many lowings replying to the first.

Michael soon recognized the woman, and came forward addressing her by name.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Tell me whether I can help you?"

"The soldiers of the monastery have set fire to the whole country," answered the terrified creature, "and are killing all who fall into their hands. We are undone; we are all ruined. Oh, mercy! what things I have seen. This is the last night for Limonta; the Lord must be punishing it for some great sin. Michael," she added, in an imploring voice; "since Providence has sent you, do me the charity to help me to pull on this obstinate beast, which is all that is left to me to support my poor children."

The boatman took the rope in his right hand, and the little girl's hand in his left, and adapted his pace to the hurried steps of the child, and thus they proceeded toward Bellagio.

"The Lord will reward you," said the unhappy woman, "for your kindness to the poor widow; it will be paid back to you in the other world, and it will help the salvation of your Arigozzo. Ah, Michael! the whole country pitied you, and talked of nothing but your grief; but to-morrow, how many will have to mourn for a son, and how many will envy you for having lost yours in the way you did."

He walked on with a bursting heart, and when he had placed the widow and her family in safety, he returned in all haste to his home.

Just as he was stepping inside, he saw a man coming toward him dressed partly in armor, and believing him to be one of the troopers devastating Limonta, he seized the bar of the door, and went boldly to meet him, but the soldier cried out: "Michael, don't you know me?"

"Oh! is it you, Lupo? Do you belong to these marauding scoundrels?"

"God preserve me from it! I was hastening to give warning, but I was not in time, for the soldiers had already arrived, and the place was on fire and our people either killed or fled; now, since force can do nothing, we must think of some plan to prevent, at least, the evil which is not yet done; to snatch from those devils' clutches those whom they have taken alive, and whom they intend to hang to-morrow, as Stefano, the fisherman, told me, whom I met on the shore of the lake."

"God preserve us! you can count on me; but what can two do against so many?" said the boatman.

"We are not alone; there are others waiting for us, and I have thought of a stratagem, and have come to seek you, knowing you are a man of spirit."

"God preserve us!" again said Michael; "you see"—

But his wife, guessing the loving anxiety that made him hesitate, said at once: "Do not think of me; the angels above will watch over this house, and even if—why, it is only duty to one's neighbors, and must be done; so go, go!"

Michael only replied with "God keep you," and departed hastily in company with Lupo, who, on the road, explained his plan. When they arrived at the village, Lupo, taking a cross-road, went to pick up three or four other Limontese, armed with hatchets and knives, who were waiting for him crouched down in a cave; and Michael, entirely unarmed, went to the churchyard, where were assembled the soldiers of the monastery. He had hardly made his appearance there, when one of them ran upon him with a drawn sword; but the boatman, lifting up his hands, cried out: "I am come to see your chief; is he not called Bellebuono?"

"And what have you to do with Bellebuono?"

"That is a secret. Come, tell me where to find him, and it will be for your advantage also."

"Well, then, old bumpkin," he said, "come with me." And he led him into the little church, where was collected the small booty taken in the place, and where were standing, with their hands tied behind them, the seven wretches who had fallen alive into the power of these ruffians, who were amusing themselves by tormenting them. Michael recognized the priest among these poor people, who was just receiving a savage blow from the fist of a soldier.

"There is Bellebuono," said Michael's conductor, pointing to the man that had dealt the blow. Our boatman went up to this person, who at first appeared ready to eat him alive, but soon softened down when some information was whispered into his ear. They spoke for some time under their breath, and then the chief of the sixty lances chose four soldiers, and went off guided by the Limontese toward a small house a little way from the village, near the valley of Roncate.

"You say it will be more than three hundred florins," said Bellebuono to his guide, they two being eight or ten paces in front of the four soldiers of the escort.

"Certainly!" was the answer; "it is the church plate and the savings of twenty years."

"But is not the priest's house the one over there near the belfry?"

"The one I am taking you to belongs to his nephew, and the treasure is there."

"Why the devil did not my soldiers find it out while they were foraging about all night?"

"But it seemed so unlikely."

They arrived at the little house on the side of the hill, and Michael said, "Here it is!"

"Now, you, Ribaldo, and you, Vinciguerra," said Bellebuono, "stay here as sentinels, and let no one out unless with me; and at the first notice you are to summon the others if we want them; and the rest of you come with me."

"Look here," said the boatman to the leader, when he had given these orders—and he spoke in a voice to be heard also by the other four soldiers—"you have promised me in return to set all your prisoners at liberty."

"Yes, I've promised you; I'll give them all to you, except the priest, who has wearied me so often with his cursed sermons that I wish to bury him nicely alive, to see if he'll have as much talk in him when he has his head downward."

"No, no," replied Michael; "you engaged for all."

"Well, then, I'll give you the priest also, provided I am not disappointed in the treasure."

Bellebuono, Michael, and the other two soldiers ran up a staircase, and found themselves in a passage, in front of which was a small door.

"If you wish me to go down with you," said the Limontese to the leader, "I will show you the place."

"Ah, you knave!" answered he, "there's some trick in the wind, and you'll be running away and leave me in the lurch like a fool. No, no, remain with these two good fellows, who will keep you company. Soldiers, whatever may happen, don't let him out of your hands till I come back."

The two lancers took the boatman between them, who went on speaking to Bellebuono, who with a lantern advanced to the door mentioned before. "You can't mistake: after the second room, a winding staircase, and under the fourth barrel, a square stone."

"Yes, yes, I remember it all," answered Bellebuono.

"Do you wish me to come also?" persisted the boatman.

"I can do it by myself." These were the last words of the trooper, who had already penetrated to the second room. They heard the sound of his steps descending a staircase, the light of the lantern gradually diminished and at last disappeared entirely. Some moments of silence followed, after which was heard, down in the cellar, a dull noise, as if something heavy had fallen.

"What can that noise be?" said the two soldiers to each other. "Can Bellebuono have stumbled? Can he have moved something? Do you think anyone could have been hidden there? Shall we go and see?"

"Let's go! but no; he said we were to wait here."

While this discussion was going on they perceived, by the light of a burning house, Bellebuono appear at the door where he had entered and make a sign to the boatman, with whom he exchanged some sentences in an undertone, and then Michael, raising his voice so as to be heard by the soldiers, said, "Now that I have kept my promise, it is for you to keep yours."

They went out, picked up the two who had remained as sentinels, and all took their way toward the church. When they were in a narrow lane, the boatman fell behind with the man whom the four lancers continued to obey as their chief, who seemed busily engaged in shaking some blood from his gauntlet.

"And what odds?" he said in a low voice, "after all, it would be more suspicious to be free from blood than to be stained with it such a night as this."

They whispered together a little longer, and then stopping short, the boatman called out to the four lancers, "Your leader is going down to the shore for a moment, to send off something which he has under his arm, and will be back directly. But you are to go with me and release the prisoners."

Then the man, who had scarcely spoken latterly, said in a low voice to the soldiers, "Take this, Ribaldo, and you, Vinciguerra, and you two besides"—and gave to each of them a handful of silver money—"this is your earnest-money, so go and release those prisoners at once." So saying, he sprang down the incline and disappeared.

The boatman, with the soldiers, continued on their way, and one said to his companion, "Did you notice how changed Bellebuono's voice seemed—how unlike himself?"

"It was because he had his visor down," answered the other.

"I'll tell you what it was rather," said another, "it was because of what he had under his arm."

"The devil!" said a third. "We soldiers are not used to see so much gold, and it rather confuses us."

"And did he really say he would go shares with us?" said the first soldier to Michael.

"One half he'll keep for himself, as is only fair, and the other he'll divide between you four."

"And you, my good fellow," said the first man, "ought not to be left with empty pockets, for you are an honest fellow, and the soldier's friend."

"As for me, I only ask for what your captain promised me; but if you give me anything, it will be so much charity."

"Come, take this, take this!" and each one put into his hand a piece of the money they had just received.

They had now arrived at the church, and on their entrance the four soldiers, in Bellebuono's name, ordered the sentinels to let the prisoners go. When they were unfastened, and on their feet, Vinciguerra said to the boatman—"Now be off, my good man, and be satisfied."

But while Michael was on his way to the mountain with his rescued friends, who overwhelmed him with a hundred questions, the news of the affair went the round of the sacristy, and a crowd of soldiers ran up to prevent the prisoners' departure.

"It's not true!" was the universal cry; "it can't be true that these are Bellebuono's orders!"

"Yes, it's true enough! he told us himself!" answered the four lancers.

"No, no, it is all made up," returned another still louder. "I tell you that as he was going off with you, just now, Bellebuono stopped a moment behind to say in my ear that another rope must be got ready for this peasant when he came back."

"But then he told us his very own self," urged the four soldiers; "he ordered us to do everything this good man wished, and to release the prisoners."

"No, no; it's a lie; there is some plot underneath!" shouted the greater number of the rabble, and some of them were beginning to lay their hands on the prisoners and the boatman, when there was a sudden cry of "Bellebuono! Bellebuono! here is Bellebuono!"

And there he was sure enough, running toward them entirely dressed in armor, with his visor down and his powerful spear in his hand. As soon as he was among the crowd, he lifted the weighty ashen weapon and laid about him right and left, calling out, or rather grumbling between his teeth, "You scoundrels! You rabble!"

When they were all dispersed, he gave his arm to the priest, and made a sign to the other rescued ones to follow him, and went off with them on the first path that led to the mountain.

When they had gone some way, the priest turned to his deliverer, and thanking him in the best way he could, told him that he could now go back, as they were in safety. All the others pressed round the supposed Bellebuono, declaring that they owed him their lives. Then he, taking off his helmet, discovered himself as Lupo.

The soldiers waited that night and the next day, and the next, for Bellebuono to come down from the mountain, but they might wait forever. The four men who had accompanied him on his last expedition went back to the same house, and down the staircase they had heard him descend, then into a ground-floor room, and into a cellar, where they found him dead on the ground.

Then they understood clearly the cunning of the clown, as they called him; they understood that there must have been men hidden in the cellar, of which they found a material proof, for they discovered a cuirass and a soldier's jacket, which one of Bellebuono's murderers had taken off in order to conceal himself under the armor of that ruffian.

The sixty lances remained still for five days at Limonta, venting their rage on those poor houses and fields; but then finding they could not discover the fugitives commanded by Lupo, they reëmbarked at last for Lecco, but not without leaving behind eight or ten of their comrades, to enrich with their corpses the fields they had devastated.

The news of these events arrived at Milan at last, and came to the ears of Marco Visconti the evening of the same day on which he had taken that ride with Ottorino which we have described.

The Abbot of San Ambrogio arrived in panting haste at his palace, and gave him the whole history.

The Abbot of San Ambrogio was quite devoted to

Marco, who made use of his name, and proposed to employ the forces of his convent for his projects, which were quite unknown to the abbot, who was used as a tool by his brother.

After the abbot had related very fully the story of Limonta, he concluded by saying: "And all this is the work, in a way I should never have expected, of one of our relatives, one of your own creatures; yes, those rebel peasants have found protection under the shadow of your name."

Marco turning on the speaker a severe glance, "What do you mean by mixing me up in this affair? Your reverence," he said to him, "do you know that although I am not accustomed to allow any under me to neglect or go beyond any of my commands, I yet am not used to suffer unjust blame to be cast on any of my people."

"Forgive me," said the abbot; "it is not that I mean to speak of any of your immediate followers; I said one of your people, because he is in the service of one of them; but he is unworthy of the post, for he is the son of a cut-throat, and looks what he is."

"Well, what is he?"

"He is a squire of Ottorino's—one Lupo, son of a falconer of Count del Balzo; it was he who killed Bellebuono. I told you that some armor and a soldier's jacket were found by the corpse; did I not?"

"Yes, you said so."

"Well, these are recognized as belonging to this Lupo, and I am told that he is coming back directly to Milan, to Ottorino's house, as if nothing had happened. But I repeat, I am sure that Ottorino had nothing to do with it. It is easy to see that this scoundrel has acted out of his own head, for, being from Limonta, he wished to assist his own people. So I came to ask your leave"—

"To do what?"

"That the monastery of San Ambrogio, as representing the Count of Limonta, should exercise its rights of lordship, to punish this criminal."

Marco appeared doubtful what to say; and the other said: "If it only concerned an offence personal to me I would forgive it; but, you see, it has to do with the honor and interest of the monastery."

"Yes, yes, the old story," said Marco. "Well, you must settle your own affairs as you please; what have I to do with them?"

"I have come to you to show my consideration for you, and my gratitude for so many favors," said the abbot. "Do not think I forget that even my new dignity is your gift."

Marco accepted the compliment as a whole, without any scruple as to limiting the gratitude of his old client, who now departed, making great protestations of devotion.

This new incident increased still more Marco's anger against Ottorino, for though in the abbot's presence he had shown himself indignant at the mere suspicion that any of his followers should have had a hand in the business, in his heart he believed that Ottorino could not be entirely guiltless; that Lupo had not left him in the dark as to what he was about to do.

CHAPTER XIII

A PLEA FOR LIFE

SINCE that day when Marco had seen, for the first time, the daughter of the Count del Balzo, the image of that lovely maiden had remained in his mind, like a vision in the dreams of a fevered man. She was, indeed, ever before him; in the midst of stormy councils and terrible secrets, she appeared to him; she was linked to all the joys and hopes of his indomitable soul; now becoming part of a splendid future, she spread around sweetness and celestial peace; now, on the contrary, it seemed as if some nerve were severed, and he were wandering in a dark, cold desert, where riches, and power, and fame, everything that usually agitated his life, was changed to vanity; it was as if, in the heat of a dance, the music had suddenly ceased, leaving the dancers astonished and in confusion.

Marco had never truly loved any other woman than Ermelinda. That love, when it became hopeless, had gradually declined as years rolled on, and had given place to the fury of faction, to thirst for dominion and vengeance, to all those other desires, some magnanimous, some base, which made him appear to the world in that both glorious and guilty character which our chroniclers have handed down to us. But the fair Ermelinda never had been quite effaced from his heart; the remembrance of her would suffice to control him sometimes in the stormy impulses of his anger—would prompt him to grant life to the supplications of an enemy, to raise one who had fallen, so that he seemed as if he might be still the friend of that angel, the young Marco, that Marco changed by fate and passion into something so different. By this time he knew that she, the mother of grown-up children, must have lost her first beauty; but still, when his thoughts turned to her, he could only fancy her as she was in the morning of her days, gay, blooming, with that face, those eyes, which, in his youth, had made the light and happiness of his life. He had never seen her since, and her image was still in all its youthful freshness before his mind. And therefore when he saw Beatrice first at Milan, and found the daughter so like his remembrance of her mother, he was fascinated in an irresistible manner. His heart, kindled into new life, beat with its old strength, and bent under the former yoke.

He thought how any prince in Italy, to say nothing of Count Balzo, would welcome the honor of having him as son-in-law, and as to Ermelinda, he thought that, though he had killed her father, he had killed him in fair fight, and out of vengeance and fierce love for herself; and that, therefore, the abhorrence she would naturally feel for the author of that deed would be, in some degree, softened by the cause of it; because there is no woman of such ferocious and austere virtue as not to incline secretly to excuse the faults derived from love for herself.

These thoughts gladdened his soul; he began to feel easier, and the poison of love entered deeper into his blood, thrilling each fiber as it ran.

But the first suspicion of the attachment between the maiden and Ottorino soon came to awake him from that dream.

That day he had arranged with Lodrisio the whole intrigue to deprive his nephew Azzone of the lordship of Milan, and Marco had decided to go himself to Ceruglio to enrol on his own account the rebel German band, as he had planned, and was to set out as soon as possible;

but since he had felt convinced of the love of the two young people, everything was upset.

After wavering among a hundred alternatives, he resolved to depart in any case, but first to summon the Count del Balzo, in order to inspire him with a great terror of the Rusconi, and to threaten him with fearful consequences, if ever, for Beatrice's sake, Ottorino should fail of his promise; he knew his man, and was certain of the success of his scheme.

After he had settled on this plan, new hopes began to fill his soul; he allowed himself to listen to some arguments which shook the despairing certainty he had at first felt. Who could prove that Beatrice had responded to Ottorino's love? There was no proof, except that very natural blush which had appeared when she saluted the young knight from the balcony, when they passed on horseback. This had sufficed to convince him, but might he not be wrong?

He caused a feast to be prepared for the day preceding that which he had arranged for his journey, and invited the Count, letting him know that he expected him without fail, in company with his daughter.

Ottorino felt very indignant at the severe and morose way in which he had been treated on the last occasion of seeing his chieftain, and had returned to justify himself, and to excuse himself for his hesitation when invited to go to Tuscany, to offer to go there after all, and to beg to be re-admitted into favor, but the door was always denied to him; and at last he was told never again to set foot in that house.

Far from suspecting the true reason for this treatment, he put it all down to his refusal of Rusconi's daughter; and in truth that seemed cause enough to account for his fall in the good graces of a man like Marco.

Then he began to think seriously of his own affairs—to renounce Beatrice was not to be thought of; but how should he arrange it with his leader? It is true, that when coming from Monza, he had boasted to the Count of being his own master, and of being able to marry without the interference of Marco; but this was really boasting, and now in cold blood he felt he could not break with this man—Marco Visconti.

And there was another reason also; if the youth had decided to take a high tone, to cross the bar, so to speak, and carry off Beatrice, without regarding wind or tide, the Count would have refused her to him: he had said he would do nothing to break with Marco.

Ottorino became agitated and melancholy, and his depression could not fail to be remarked by Ermelinda and her daughter, with whom he passed a great part of his time. They began to urge him to tell them the cause of his new trouble, and he tried to parry their solicitude, either by silence or by turning the conversation, till at last they suspected something serious.

And the maiden's father—the Count del Balzo? Poor man! intoxicated with his triumphs, with the compliments he constantly received, with the respectful treatment he met on all sides, as an intimate friend of Marco, he hardly remembered he possessed a wife and a daughter; he seemed to think himself above all earthly ties; and woe to Ermelinda if she attempted to draw him from his proud heights, to recall him for a moment to some affair below; woe to her if she spoke of Beatrice, of the nuptial arrangements that did not proceed, of the suspicions she had conceived from the behavior of Ottorino; he flew at once into a passion: "What a fuss you are making! Let things go on quietly—is not everything smooth? what difficulty can arise? they will be betrothed when he returns. One would think you wished to get rid of her!"

Ottorino, after some days, began to show signs of a desire to hasten the marriage, insinuating at the same time the need of keeping it secret, and at last, driven into a corner by Ermelinda, he owned something of his fears as to Marco, as much as to say that perhaps it might displease him to announce it openly at once, so as not to appear to have broken with the Rusconi. She persisted in her inquiries, till at last he told her everything.

After this, whenever the loving mother found herself alone with her daughter, and saw her silent and sad, she guessed that her reticence was fretting Beatrice's heart —but what could she tell her?—that she must think no more of the marriage? that she must forget Ottorino? She did not really think it had come to this pass; and then she well understood it would be too late.

She therefore thought it best to tell her everything. Ottorino, often in private conversations with the ladies, tried to cheer them with fallacious hopes. "Marco," he said, "is soon going to Tuscany; he is sure to stay there a long time; new scenes, and the new concerns in which he will be involved will dissipate all these vexations. He will see clearly that this is only an impediment to be easily surmounted, a momentary caprice; it is just like the man; but when Beatrice is mine, everything will arrange itself for the best, you will see. One thing arises from another; time makes great changes. What may happen before he returns—who can tell? Perhaps it may no longer matter to him to break with the Rusconi, or that the Rusconi may feel it concerns them too much to keep friends with the Visconti, to make wry faces over a castle in the air; because, as I have often said, it is not only that I have never given my word, but Marco himself never entered into any engagement. And then the devotion with which I have followed him, the fidelity I have shown to him—he is too noble to forget such services as these."

Beatrice's mind seemed calmed by these and other reasons, but the mother felt uneasy.

And it was another trouble to think that if the Count ever found out Marco's opposition, everything would be stopped. Things went on quietly till a squire of the Visconti came to the house of Balzo, to invite the father and daughter to the feast. Ottorino was comforted, and though he was annoyed at seeing himself excluded, he combated all the reasons Ermelinda brought forward to prevent her husband taking their daughter, and all the reasons urged by Beatrice herself for not going there, as soon as it was known that she also was invited.

On the evening of the feast the Count paraded about a saloon in his own house, in a robe of flowered velvet, made for the occasion, and a pair of shoes with the points much longer than the feet, turned up, and fastened with a chain of gold that passed under the knee; he strutted like a peacock with pride at seeing himself so gay. A sister of his, who was to accompany Beatrice instead of her mother, was seated by Ermelinda, impatiently waiting for her niece.

A secret terror filled the girl's soul as the time approached for appearing before Marco, now that she knew that Ottorino had fallen under his displeasure; she trembled at the mere imagination of being with this man, and needed to borrow a little courage from the presence and words of the young knight, for whose sake principally she forced herself to bear this ordeal; but he had not been seen all day.

The aunt took Beatrice's hand, who knew not how to excuse herself from accompanying her, and had arrived at the door of the hall, when Ottorino suddenly appeared, crying out, "Only imagine! Lupo has been seized by the satellites of the Abbot of San Ambrogio; seized by night, treacherously, while he slept; they have condemned him to death, and to-morrow morning will be his last!"

Lauretta, hearing to what a state her beloved brother was reduced, rushed off in agonies of terror to tell her parents; all the others remained as if bewitched.

"I have implored, I have promised, I have threatened," pursued Ottorino, "but all in vain. The abbot must be certain of the consent of Marco, or he never would have dared to lay hands on a squire of mine."

"Listen, Ottorino," said the Count, stammering in his agitation: "I told you how it would be, but you would act in your own way."

But the ladies interrupted him; for they felt that time must not be lost in useless recrimination.

"Why not go at once to Marco?" he said to Ottorino. "The affront has been put upon you; you are bound to him by blood and friendship."

"I have been to his house, but he refuses to receive me."

"What? What do you say? Marco will not listen to you!"

Ottorino, in his agitation, told how affairs had been going on, and how Marco, for some time, had not been willing to see him.

"Then you are in disgrace with the Visconti!" exclaimed the father of Beatrice. "Ah, now I understand what Ermelinda was muttering to me about a little time ago!—that I must not let Marco know anything about the wedding being settled, nor speak of you to him. This is the key of the mystery, and I was told nothing about it. Well, well, if it is, I cry off, I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"And will you let the son of one of your retainers die, without saying a word to save his life? that life which he has voluntarily exposed for his country and for you?" said Ermelinda.

"Good heavens! don't you see I am already in the abbot's black books? And then what claim have I that I could take so much upon myself?"

"What," said the Count's sister, "are you not the most intimate friend Marco has? And is not this an affair known to everybody? and will you draw back when it is a question of saving one of your retainers?"

"But how can I?"

"You can and ought to do it," persisted the sister.

"Now listen," urged Ottorino, "the night when Marco is taking leave of his friends, in the midst of festive gayety, he cannot refuse the first favor asked of him—he has a humane heart. Tell him that this is a brave fellow condemned for having saved his countrymen, for having snatched innocent people from the claws of a savage rabble; remind him that this is a soldier, who has fought under the banner of the Visconti serpent and has stained it with his blood; that he must not let a valiant man die the death of a malefactor; that Lupo has a father and a mother."

Here Count del Balzo looked toward the door, having heard from that quarter the sound of groaning and weeping, rapidly approaching. The door was flung wide open, and then entered the falconer, Marianna, and Lauretta, all in tears, and white as death. Ambrose threw himself at his master's feet, embraced his knees, and tried to pronounce some words, but only succeeded in uttering an inarticulate groan.

"My son! my son!" he exclaimed at last with difficulty. "Oh, save my son!"

The Count bent down to raise him from the ground; but he waved him off. "No," he cried, "leave me here to die; I will not rise till you have promised to save him."

"I will do all that is in my power; come, get up, Ambrose, take courage."

"Do you hear?" said Marianna; "the master has promised you; do be calm and trust in the Lord."

"You have promised me? Oh, tell that man, in whose hands lies the fate of my Lupo, that man who with a word can give him safe back to me, tell him to think of his own father, whose favorite son he was. And, if the abbot will have satisfaction, I am here, the same flesh and blood, I, who advised him, and the fault is mine: he only obeyed his father." He rose, and going toward Ottorino with a gesture more resolute than respectful: "It is for you to save him," he said—"for you, who placed him in the straits he now is in."

"And do you think," said his wife, "this is the way to treat a gentleman so good, who will help him?"

"Oh, may God bless you!" burst forth Ambrose, quite cheered, "forgive me; pity a poor father who is beside himself, and knows not what he says or does."

The Count dried his eyes and said: "Do not doubt that I will do for you all that I would do for my own son." He called Beatrice and his sister, and set off.

Outside the door they found Bernardo, the falconer's other son, waiting for them.

Marianna, who thought of this her favorite son, more than of anything else in the world, at the first announcement of the fatal news had sprung to her feet.

"It is your place, Bernardo," she cried, "it is for you, to run down to the master, you who can talk. We are common people, but you can say the things as they ought to be said."

The stupid fellow began to stammer out: "But how —tell me?" but Ambrose rushed off down the staircase, and his wife and daughter after him.

Then he placed himself in front of the Count, and in the voice and cold, stiff manner of one who is reciting a sermon learned by heart, began. "Although Lupo—notwithstanding that my brother has gone astray." But his father catching him by his shoulder, gave him a shake and called out: "Let him pass, for God's sake."

The master passed on unimpeded, and Bernardo remained there in his place, looking like a fool.

CHAPTER XIV

A WILD RIDE

THE banquet hall was resplendent with wax-tapers, the light of which was reflected from the ornaments and mirrors on the walls, and from the wreaths and jewels of the gay dancers. In the midst of the sparkling scene, and the joyous sound of musical instruments, Marco, gnawed by secret cares and uneasy discontent, spent his time inwardly cursing that foolish gayety which accorded so ill with the tone of his feelings, and in which he was bound to appear to share. From time to time he retired into a room that opened into the hall, placed himself at a window, and looked down into the courtyard, to watch for the arrival of Count del Balzo, straining his ears to distinguish the noise of horses approaching; but he could hear nothing but the echo of the festive sounds. He was obliged to return to his former post, to go on looking at the dancing, to talk of the morrow's tournament, and to receive the good wishes and compliments of his friends on his journey into Tuscany.

The Count at last appeared with his daughter and sister. Marco, who at that moment was at the other end of the hall, saw that the girl was pale and agitated; and shuddered, overcome by mingled emotions of pity and love. During the short time he spent in crossing the hall to meet them, he felt at one time that she appeared to him as an angel, and at another as his bitterest foe; he felt inclined at one moment to prostrate himself at her feet—the next to assail her with bitter words. But he did not allow his agitation to become apparent. After the usual words of welcome, the aunt led Beatrice into the midst of a party of matrons and maidens, who saw with mixed astonishment and envy the beauty of the girl, enhanced by a certain native purity which she had brought from her mountains.

Count del Balzo had remained alone in Marco's company; but neither spoke, hoping that the other would break the ice, and say something that might be applicable.

Marco had begun to walk up and down, and his companion followed him, in the greatest perplexity. At last he took courage, and said something about the festivity; but his auditor allowed the subject to drop at once, so that Beatrice's father found that he had better come to the point by the shortest road. He took a grand resolve, and began:

"Will you listen to me, Marco? It may appear to you that I am taking a liberty, but your kindness emboldens me, and I—wish to ask a favor of you."

"A favor of me?" replied Marco, walking toward the embrasure of a window, where the Count followed him.

After Visconti had remained silent for a moment, as if waiting for an answer to his proud question, he asked:

"Had you not better ask the same favor from Rusconi; he who must be so indebted to you would, perhaps, be more inclined to grant it?"

Beatrice's father stammered out:

"What do you mean? I am not aware of having offended anyone; and as to Rusconi, I hardly know him!"

"Oh, you may be sure that he will make himself known to you," replied Marco. "Rusconi is not the sort of man that will forget an obligation, or cannot reward services done him even by one who is unknown to him." And he moved as if he would go away.

But the other, pressing nearer:

"I beg you," he urged, "to explain yourself. What do you mean? I really do not know. Unless it is on account of this boy—of Ottorino."

Marco, who wished him to explain himself further, continued to pretend to move off.

"I assure you, I know nothing about it; it is not my fault," urged the Count. "The boy, it is true—I cannot deny it—let us say that he did wish to marry my daughter; but I spoke very openly to him, said I would not hear of displeasing you, and that I never should be persuaded to give her to him, unless first"—

Marco, becoming feverishly excited, asked:

"But Beatrice—does she agree willingly to this marriage?" and waited for the reply with such a countenance that the Count turned cold.

"Beatrice?" he answered, hesitating. "You ask me about her feelings. She would always accept whatever bridegroom her parents proposed to her. The poor child is as gentle and innocent as a dove, and she cares only for her mother and me."

"Then you think she will not be unhappy if this marriage is stopped."

"Unhappy? No, indeed! She is not that kind of girl. I know exactly what my daughter is made of, and she has not a thought in the world for this man."

On hearing these blessed words, Marco was seized with such joy and such universal charity, that he would gladly have thrown his arms round the speaker's neck, but he restrained himself, and with an expression not quite so stormy as at first, answered:

"As this is the case, so far it is well for her and well for you; for I should have thought it a very serious misfortune for you to be on bad terms with a nobleman of the position and temper of Rusconi; and also on my own account, I confess I should regret to have to reckon among my—among those who are against me, and with whom I cannot be on good terms, a friend of my early youth." And here, assuming a confidential tone, but in a lordly style, as of one who lowers himself for a moment to an equality with the person addressed, he placed a hand on the Count's shoulder, and then added: —"Perhaps you do not know that I have arranged myself the engagament between Ottorino and the daughter of this Comese noble. Now the boy appears to me to hesitate, and even to wish to draw back; but matters have reached a point where it concerns my own honor. Enough, if you agree with me, everything will be smooth, and Ottorino will not make any objection, for he knows it will not suit him to contend with me."

"Oh you may be sure," said the Count, "that you will not be annoyed by anything connected with me; and if I had known before how things were, I should certainly not have allowed the youth to visit so freely at my house on any consideration."

"Well, we will forget the past and speak of it no more; but for the future"—

"For the future, I give you my word that he shall never cross my threshold."

At this point Marco would willingly have dropped a hint to the Count of the intentions he had about Beatrice, but he could not decide on doing so before himself questioning the maiden. Having now brought his companion to the desired point, he dismissed him by saying:

"Well, Count, that is enough, and I am very glad to remain much better friends with you than I expected before this conversation."

The Count began to find grievous fault with his wife, his daughter, and Ottorino for involving him in such an unfortunate affair.

After he had digested a portion of his rage, and was somewhat comforted by thinking that the error was repaired, he recalled Lupo, and the favor he was to have asked for him from Marco.

He remembered Lupo, his parents, his sister; he recalled their piteous words, their faces, their tears; he thought of the promise he had given, and felt remorse and shame; but not even all these considerations could make him hesitate as to what course he should pursue.

The idea of speaking to Marco about a squire of Ottorino's, after that scarcely civil treatment—it would be ridiculous, he seriously thought. "No, no, that would not suit me at all; Lupo and all his people must fare as they can, but I cannot mix myself up in it for any one's sake."

Beatrice had seen her father in prolonged colloquy with Marco, had imagined they were speaking of Lupo, and waited breathlessly to hear the result. When Visconti at last returned to the company, she turned on him a timid and anxious glance, to try to read on his face the fate of her *protégé*, but was not able to make out anything.

"And what did he say to you?" she asked her father, as soon as he approached.

"About what?"

"Why, of course, about a reprieve for Lupo, which you begged of him."

"Reprieve! I have asked for no reprieve!"

"Oh, holy Virgin! has he then refused you? Did he say no?"

"He has said neither no nor yes; it's not my business, nor yours. Do you understand? and you must hold your tongue, do you hear? for with your prating you have nearly ruined us all."

"But have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, because I know something now, which I did not know before."

"But is it really so? Must he die?"

"Yes; be quiet, I tell you, silly girl, and don't make a scene."

"O father! I will speak to him, I will throw myself on my knees to him, and beg him so much"—

"You, too! that is the only thing wanting to"—

"But why not? only tell me."

"I have told you quite enough; take care, and attend to your own concerns."

The Count disappeared among the company, and his daughter felt she must be in a dream.

Marco, who had not taken his eyes off her, approached the seat where she was, and asked her, after obtaining her aunt's permission, to do him the honor of taking a turn with him round the festal hall, and he would then point out to her the knights that were to be the managers of the tourney.

"The champions are, as you know, to be twelve," said Visconti to the damsel, leading her down the hall; "eleven I can show you, for they are all here; the twelfth you will not find in this room; but I am aware it is not necessary for me to point him out to you, for you are already acquainted with him, are you not?"

Beatrice blushed deeply, but said nothing.

"I saw you salute him very kindly a few days ago, when we were passing your house; and also I know he was at Limonta for a long time, and that now"—

"Yes, I know him, and he has a squire for whom"—

"We will not speak of his squire, if you please," interrupted Marco; "let us speak a little of himself."

At this point, the girl turned round and saw her father putting his finger on his lips, with the intention of reminding her to be silent and careful. This only increased the embarrassment and fear of the poor child, but, summoning all her courage, she began in a tremulous voice:

"My Lord, may I hope that you will listen to my humble and earnest petition?"

"Did you not accept me as your knight and vassal?"

replied Marco; "so you must not use such language to me. You have not to offer a petition, but merely to signify your will."

There was a few moments' silence, and during that time they were passing through three or four smaller saloons, and had arrived in a room apart, out of sight of the guests. The girl, entirely occupied with what she was about to ask Visconti, and he, engrossed by his absorbing passion, were far from thinking of what there might be strange and unseemly in withdrawing in this way from the party.

When Beatrice found herself in that solitary place, though a little confused, she fell on her knees before her companion, and said sobbing:

"One word from you can save him; have pity on a miserable family! Oh, if I could weep in the way his poor father wept just now! If God would put his words into my mouth, I am sure you could deny me nothing."

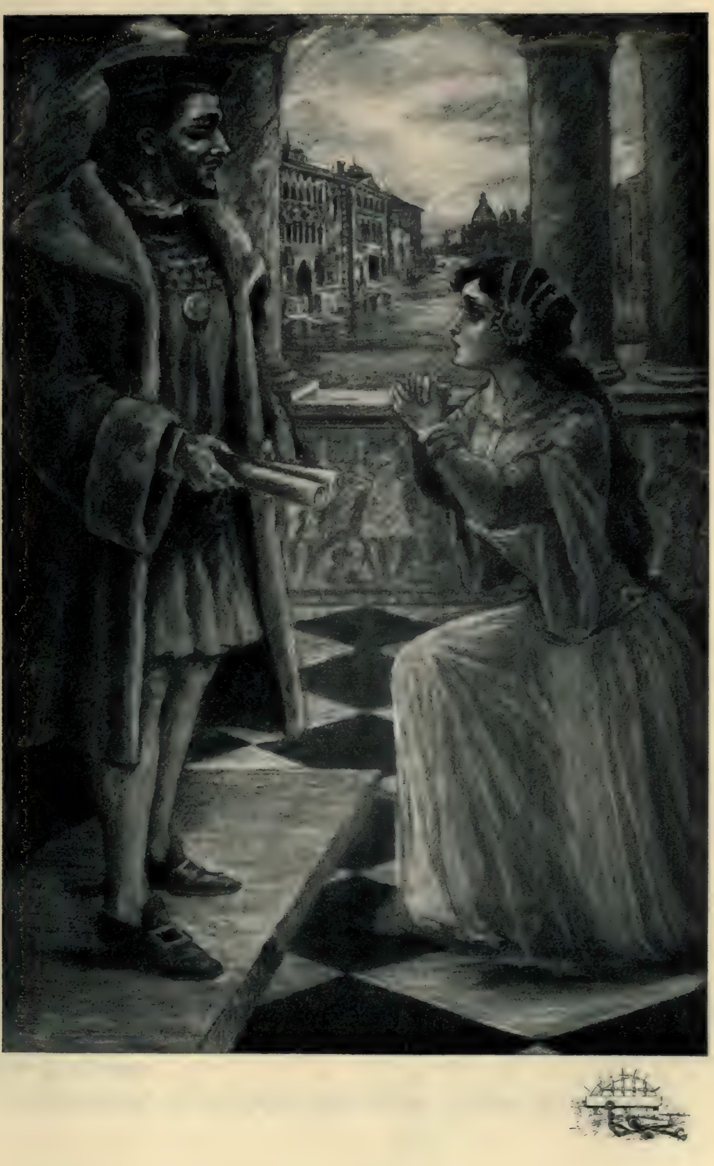
She spoke in this manner, believing that her father, according to his intention, had informed Visconti of everything; but he, who knew nothing, hearing himself addressed with such fervor, at first was stupefied, and then, giving way successfully to compassion, love, and the confusion of seeing in such a servile attitude the queen of his thoughts, bent down to raise her up, saying:

"What are you doing? You of all creatures shall not prostrate yourself before a human being."

She, however, would not leave her position, and continued to implore him, joining her hands, and raising them to him with tearful eyes, in such an attitude that Visconti seemed to see in the girl before him her own mother, who in the same way had thrown herself on her knees to him, in earnest entreaty, so many years before, that night when he had come to carry her off from her paternal home. He raised the supplicant, made her sit down on a couch, and while Beatrice, covering her face

VISCONTI SEEMED TO SEE IN THE GIRL BEFORE HIM HER OWN MOTHER

From an Original Drawing by R. E. Gould



with both her hands, wept immoderately, he, without daring to approach her, continued:

"Tell me your wish, and I swear to you, as my hope of eternal salvation is dear to me, that I will do all that in me lies to content you; all! if it concerns the State; my life, my honor. Tell me, then, who it is that I can save!"

"Lupo," answered the girl, between her sobs.

"Who? That vassal of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who is condemned to die?"

"Yes, he is the son of my father's falconer, and brother to my own beloved attendant—oh, if you had seen their grief!"

"Now pray do not weep any more: Lupo is safe, I give him to you. I wish I could redeem each one of your tears with a drop of my blood! There, Ermelinda, Ermelinda! you madden me; Beatrice, do not weep; Lupo shall not die."

"You have said that he shall live?"

"Yes, and I swear it on my soul."

At these words the girl sprang up quickly to her feet, and flying toward the deliverer, attempted again to throw herself on the ground to thank him; but she was not able to do so, for he caught and prevented her, and she, confused, excited, and exhausted, by the sudden relief, let herself fall into his arms. Marco felt himself tremble beneath that beloved burden, the hot tears of the beautiful girl fell on his hand, and her tender bosom beat against his agitated breast; quite beside himself, he bent for a moment over that fair head, and kissed it. Beatrice was aware of the kiss, but was not more disturbed than if it had been a kiss from her father. She raised herself calmly, and while her eyes were still wet with tears, on her face appeared a smile expressing her new gladness.

Marco went to a table, and wrote a few sentences to the Abbot of San Ambrogio desiring him at once to set at liberty the same Lupo of whom they had spoken some days before. He fastened the letter with a silken ribbon, on which he placed his seal, wrote the address, and, giving it to Beatrice:

"Let the abbot have it," he said, "and Lupo will be restored to you."

"God will reward you for the innocent blood you have spared," said the damsel—"the many tears you have dried: the whole family will pray for you always, always;" and she turned to go away.

"Beatrice!" said Marco, and signed her to stop; "I ask you to give me one more moment: you will have time to send the letter before to-morrow morning. Listen: I am to depart this night for a long journey, but the memory of this moment—your memory, Beatrice—believe that it is forever enshrined in my heart."

"And I shall not forget the kindness you have done me; I will pray for you also. And to think that I was so afraid to speak to you before. My mother told me you had a good and generous heart."

"Then your mother does not hate me? then she has forgiven me? and you, Beatrice, do you forgive me also? you will not hate me?"

"I? what can you mean? my gratitude, my respect"—

"That is not enough for me, and it is not what I require of you," exclaimed Visconti, taking her hand between his own, which trembled as a leaf. "Why should I dissimulate longer? Do you know, Beatrice, that from the moment I saw you, my destiny was fixed unchangeably? I am waiting now for a word of life or death from your mouth."

The girl trembled in her turn, and attempted to leave him. But Visconti, interrupting himself in the middle of his speech unclosed his hands, and after a moment's silence, questioned her in a stern tone:

"Tell me, this Lupo is a squire of the person of whom you spoke to me just now?"

"Yes, he is his squire."

"His?—whose?"

"His; your cousin's; that knight."

"Tell me—whose?" he asked her, fiercely.

"Ottorino's," said Beatrice, blushing.

"Now, answer me as you would answer your confessor at the point of death. Is it to please him that you come to ask for Lupo's life?"

"It was my father who was to speak for him."

"That is not what I ask. Tell me from your own soul, whether it was he who induced you to take this step."

"Yes—at least, he begged my father, because, being in disgrace, he did not venture."

"Ah! you know all his secrets! And when did you see him?"

"A few minutes before coming to your house."

"And you see him every day—do you not? and the promise which you have given him—tell me—did it come from your heart? are you in love with him? tell me, in God's name."

Beatrice was silent with terror.

"You do not deny it, then?"

"No, I do not deny it," uttered the girl, faintly. "He—is to be my husband."

"Death and damnation!" burst forth Marco, with a voice of suppressed thunder, and snatching, so to speak, from Beatrice's hands, the letter, he fell upon it furiously, as if he were going to tear it in pieces.

The poor child felt her knees tremble, and her eyes grow dim, and she fell in a faint on the floor. Visconti stood gazing at her for a moment with a fierce and malignant expression; his right hand glided imperceptibly toward his dagger, but he withdrew it at once, and placing the letter in the girdle of the swooning girl, he went out precipitately down a secret staircase into an inner courtyard. He jumped on a horse that was in readiness for his departure that night, and galloped down the street immediately before him, as if flying from a pursuing enemy, but this enemy was seated on his own horse's croup, and left him neither peace nor breathing-time.

As he sped through the darkness, he seemed to feel somewhat refreshed by the cool night breeze playing on his face; and continued to gallop on like one possessed. He pursued his journey with his head sunk on his breast, until he saw through the trees the towers of the castle of Rosate, which was one of his fiefs. When he came to the edge of the fosse, he struck three blows with his sword-hilt on the iron pommel of his saddle, the drawbridge was let down, and he entered the castle.

On entering the second courtyard, he met the warder, who ran up to hold his stirrup. This was Pelagrua, steward of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who had been expelled from Limonta, and whom Marco had placed here and made him his warder. Marco leaped from his horse, and threw him the reins, enjoining him to tell no one of his arrival.

CHAPTER XV

OUT FROM THE SHADOW

WHEN Beatrice recovered her senses, she found herself on a bed in a strange room, and at once besought a servant maid, who was by her side, to tell her where her father was. As she spoke she saw him standing on her other side, so raising herself, and then springing to her feet, she caught his arm, and said:

"Let us get away, let us go directly."

On their way home, the Count asked her the explanation of all this disturbance; but she hastened on without answering. Afterward, remembering Marco's letter, she found it in her girdle, and gave it to her father, saying:

"Here it is; oh, here it is!"

"What's this?'

"Lupo's pardon. A letter written by Marco."

"But—I do not understand—then he gave you what you asked? but you asked nothing more? you did not allude to—Ottorino?"

"He asked me himself about him."

"And what did you answer? how did you behave? come, speak, have you lost your tongue?"

"Oh, let me alone, I implore you. I will tell all—to my mother."

"Well, your concealments won't succeed. Now, once for all, remember what I tell you—you are never to see that man again, never again."

All the way the Count did nothing but storm and rage, but when they arrived at their own door, he said to his daughter:

"Give me that paper;" and she obeyed.

The parents of Lupo, with Ermelinda and Ottorino, and the whole family, were waiting for them. Hardly did they appear in the passage when everyone ran to meet them with lights; but when they saw the expression on the faces of Beatrice and her father, there was a general cry of lamentation.

The Count, leaving his daughter, who threw herself into her mother's arms, signed to Ottorino to follow him, gave him Marco's letter, and said:

"This is your squire's reprieve; so go now, both of you, in God's name; but remember that neither of you ever enters my house again."

Ottorino recognized the writing and the seal of Marco, and the unexpected joy of seeing this proof of his follower's safety almost prevented him from taking in the full sense of the cruel intimation just made to him.

He ran at once into the hall where all the others were assembled, and cried:

"Pardon! pardon! here is Marco's letter!"

They all rushed to see, to touch that blessed sheet; they cried, they wept, they embraced each other.

"Now, quickly, to horse!" cried Ottorino.

Two steeds were soon prepared, one for him, the other for the falconer, who insisted on accompanying him; and away they galloped towards Chiaravalle.

"Give me the letter," said the knight to Ambrose; "give it to me, and I will conceal it."

"Oh, let me have it," implored the father; "see, I have it in my bosom; if I did not feel it, or hold it in my hand, I should feel I had lost the very heart out of my body."

On the road, as was natural, they spoke of nothing but Lupo. He, in the mean time, was spending his time walking up and down a small ground-floor room in one of the towers of the Abbey of Chiaravalle, where was a walnut-wood table, on which stood a lighted lantern, a wooden crucifix hanging on one side of the wall, and a *prie-dieu* before it. Four soldiers stood sentinel at the door, a fifth remained in the room with the prisoner; this fifth was Vinciguerra, one of those who had accompanied Bellebuono on his last expedition to Limonta.

"Just see what a trick that old peasant played us," said Vinciguerra.

"Don't let your tongue run so fast," said Lupo.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that if we are to remain friends I don't wish to hear those brave people evil spoken of."

"Ah, you are all alike, you will do anything to stick by each other; you are a mountaineer, and that's enough!"

"Certainly—and I am proud of it; better to be a mountain sparrow-hawk than a marsh wild duck."

"Yes, I know; you are from Limonta, and I from Chiaravalle; but after all we are both vassals of the monastery."

"Vassal of the monastery—I know I am, for my sins; but I never did them any service. A nice idea, forsooth! to be ordered about by a fellow with a shaven crown, and a holy-water brush in his hand!"

"Why, you don't think," said Vinciguerra, "that I care for the cause we fight for. Do you remember the days when we fought together under Marco Visconti?"

"Long live Marco!" exclaimed Lupo, fired by that name, which was wont to make the heart of every Lombard soldier quiver with pride. "That's the man for me! he always was first in performing prodigies in action; and then how freehanded and affable he was, and so friendly with his men; whenever there was any booty every man had his share, and if we had to go without, all suffered alike; not like your fellows, who, crammed and gorged to the eyes, call out to you from the refectory, 'Forward! forward!' And then what fine enterprises! like that last one at Limonta—a lot of armed rabble, who sneak in by night to attack by stealth poor unarmed people; do you call that the trade of a soldier?"

"You are quite right."

"Anyhow, if I had arrived in time to get those poor wretches in trim, I can tell you it would have been quite a different story."

"Poor Lupo! we have been comrades in arms! and now see what I am obliged to do."

"Do your duty."

"Yes; but believe me, having to mount guard over you here, knowing where I have to conduct you—I really cannot stand it."

"Never mind, wash it down with a glass of wine," said the condemned man; and pouring out two glasses from a large flask, he added: "Here's to Marco's good health!"

"That is no traitor's toast," replied the sentinel, "for Marco is a good friend to the monastery and cousin to the abbot—so that I can accept your challenge, and give a good reason for it. Here's to Marco's health and yours too!"

"Did you drink my health, too?" said the Limontese, when he had finished. "I suppose you meant my soul's health—for as to that of my body, little remains to be done. See (looking out of window), the sky is beginning to lighten—there is but a short time to wait now. Is it not to be at an hour after sunrise?"

"My poor boy! I fear it is."

"Listen now," continued Lupo; "do we not become soldiers to be killed when necessary? Well, then, to die from the blow of an ax that splits your head like an apple, or from a lance-thrust that runs you through like a frog—or, anyhow, if you die doing your duty, it is all one, and I am to die for having done my duty. However, to tell the truth, it is *not* all the same—the more I try to soften it off, the harder it seems. To end one's days on three bits of wood, tied up like a cut-throat, before all the rabble who rush to see you as if you were a criminal, is not the same thing as dying on the field of battle, on a noble charger, dealing desperate blows right and left, with the braying of trumpets in your ears and the hope of victory in your heart."

"That is just what I was going to say," replied the sentinel; "what does it matter to me, whether I die to-day or to-morrow?"

"And do you think," rejoined Lupo, "that I am not of the same mind? I am quite prepared to accept my fate."

"Do you wish me to call Father Athanasius, whom you sent away a little while ago?"

"Certainly not. I have already done all that is requisite. Indeed, I would have kept him till now, but he worried me so with his long stories, that—however, I told him pretty plainly he had better take himself off out of my sight."

"Oh! but he was here for the good of your soul, to enable you to make your peace with God, and to get you to repeat some prayers, as those things are proper to be done by one who is bound in your direction."

"Not exactly; as long as he spoke to me about religion I listened to him, but afterward he got on the subject of Bellebuono, and would have it that that was a murder; whereas, if I had no other sin but that—never mind, I told him plainly and clearly that I would do it again without scruple."

"Oh, comrade, I think the priest was right."

"Then you are as great a numskull as the rest; but come, I'll give you a case in point."

"Let us hear it."

"Supposing," said Lupo, "I had got to Limonta an hour earlier, and, through a false message sent to Bellebuono, had enticed him and all the rest of you into a mountain gorge, and had fallen upon you with my brave peasants, and had killed you all like rats in a trap, should I have committed a mortal sin? am I obliged to confess?"

"No; for that would be a stratagem of war."

"And was not what I did a stratagem of war, except that, instead of killing you all, I killed only one?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"Why, everything. Besides, does not the reason for it count for something? Had I not the right to kill him, to defend so many of my poor countrymen, as well as our priest, whom he was going to torture and put to death for his own amusement?"

"My dear fellow, a fine tale you have told me; the idea of a soldier wanting a reason for what he does!"

"I know that; but what I said was by way of comparison, for this was not a case of legitimate warfare, but an unprovoked attack of a mob of thieves and cut-throats."

"Come, come! gently a bit, with all these hard names. I can tell you I have always acted like a soldier, and never like a thief or a cut-throat; and if it were not that"—

Lupo burst out laughing, and said, "Get away with you, you silly fellow, are you going to quarrel with me, a man who in half-an-hour will be in the other world? However, you have found your match, a man in the death agony"—

"What will you say next, I wonder? I know that with you—anyhow, we have always been friends; but

—you understand there are certain limits—it cannot be allowed."

"But, don't you see, I meant it merely as a comparison?"

"Well, if that was all, no harm is done."

"I wish to part friends, don't you?" replied Lupo, offering him his hand.

"With all my heart," said the other, squeezing it affectionately, and then added, "I grasp the hand of a brave soldier and a good comrade."

And now the sad tones of the passing-bell broke the stillness of the chamber.

"I see," said Lupo, "I have no time to lose. Listen, Vinciguerra, I have something to tell you. The first time you chance to go to Milan ask for the house of Count Balzo, in the Brera del Guercio; there you will find my father and mother." Then he walked across the room, and, turning to Vinciguerra, "You will not fail?" he said.

"May God give me neither prosperity in this life, nor repose in the next, if I fail."

Then Lupo took a silver chain from his neck, and handed it to the sentinel, saying:

"Tell them to wear it for my sake; and tell my sister to look in a chest of drawers in the chamber next the falcon's mew, where she will find a small boxwood casket containing a gold ring, which is a last relic of the plunder from Tuscany; I had reserved it for her against her marriage, and now she must keep it as a memorial of my affection."

"Listen," said Vinciguerra. "I am not wealthy, but, thank God, I have a little pay left; look here," taking from his pocket a handful of coins.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"You will be doing me a charity by accepting them, as you will save me half-a-dozen drinking bouts. I will take them to your father, who may be in want of them."

"No, no! thank you."

"Come, do me this favor—vouchsafe me this consolation. I swear to you that I enjoy far more giving away these few coins for love of you than I should have done had I got the share of the plunder from Limonta promised me by that fellow—your man, I mean."

Lupo laid his hand on his shoulder, and said: "I feel extremely your kind offer, and I know all we soldiers give and take most generously; but, thank God, my parents have need of nothing. See, too, if I wished to send them any, I have plenty of money here." And, so saying, he emptied the pocket of his doublet, and turned out on the table a good handful of money. "You have sixty soldiers in your company, have you not?"

"There were sixty, but we left eleven of them in your beautiful Limonta country, in that choice expedition, so that we cannot now be more than forty-nine."

Lupo raised his head, and a smile flashed across his face at the mention of the prowess of his countrymen. "Well," he said, "I suppose those that are left will have no objection to drink a toast to the health of a condemned criminal?"

"Two, if you like; but my share shall go to pay for masses to be said for your soul."

"But not by the monks of San Ambrogio, I hope," said Lupo, "take care of that! for I do not want to receive anything at the hands of those schismatic cowards. By-the-by, I forgot one thing: I have a brother, with whom I have not got on very well, but when one is near death one must put all that aside, if for no other reason, for my mother's sake, whose favorite he is. I must send something also to him. I have a small silver crucifix here, which I had wished to give to you as a memento, and I hardly know how to arrange it between you."

"A brother of yours? Well, it is easily managed; I will take your crucifix, and will give you this relic to send to him—look at it;" and, unfastening his waistcoat, he exhibited it. "It is a splinter of the column of St. Simeon Stylites; I took it with my own hands from a pilgrim on his return from the Holy Land, whom I stripped one night in Romagna."

"Bravo!" said Lupo," "I accept the exchange. Now that I have settled my affairs here on earth, it is time that I should give all my thoughts to my soul." And, going toward the crucifix that hung on the wall, he knelt before it in prayer.

The courtyard of the palace of the monastery, and the portico that surrounded it, into which the room opened where Lupo was confined, were full of curious spectators; idle folk, who, as is the case in all ages and in all countries, hasten to look on at the last punishment of a human creature, as if they were taking part in some festivity or wild orgy.

The hour was already past when the prisoner was to have been brought to the gibbet, and the foolish populace began to murmur at the delay.

At last arose a report, which many voices repeated: "They are coming! They are coming!" The people began to push against each other, to surge to and fro, and to raise themselves on their tip-toes, turning toward the door of the courtyard. Vinciguerra ran back into the room.

The door opened, two of the four sentries came in, and behind them a monk with a paper in his hand. Lupo perceived over the latter's shoulder that another man was following, and, suspecting who he might be, cast down his eyes with an involuntary shudder. But suddenly he felt an unexpected and close pressure; and looking up, he found himself in the arms of his father, who, straining him to his breast, was too much agitated to weep or to speak.

"You have made a mistake in coming to see me at this last moment," said Lupo, as soon as he could get in a word; "my thoughts were full of eternal life and the Lord above, and you have done neither yourself nor me a kindness."

Ambrose, finding that his voice would not serve him, made gestures of negation with head and hand; and at last, after a long effort, he uttered these words between his sobs:

"No; you are not to die!"

"Oh, yes, I must die! I grieve for you all; but I have settled all my worldly affairs."

While the falconer was embracing him still tighter, and saying, "No, no, no," with movements of his head, the monk said to Lupo:

"Your father speaks the truth—the abbot has reprieved you."

"A reprieve!" shouted the guards in the room. "A reprieve!" reëchoed the sentinels, who had remained at the door; and this shout was repeated from one to another under the colonnade, in the courtyard, and through the street close to the palace, by the people who were streaming along in crowds.

"Be thankful for the abbot's mercy," said the monk.

"We came here, Ottorino and I," said the falconer, "with a letter from Marco Visconti to the abbot to ask pardon for you."

"A letter from Marco!" cried Lupo. "Marco forever!"

"Long live Marco!" shouted the sentinels. "Marco forever!" was heard from all outside.

In the mean time a hundred different rumors were current among the crowd.

When the liberated man was seen to come out, holding his father's arm, the exultation of the whole crowd would have done credit to the most humane assembly in our softer times.

They were, however, the same persons that had hurried so short a time ago to see the poor fellow die, and who were murmuring at the delay in the execution.

In the square of Chiaravalle, Lupo and his father found Ottorino, and close to him some peasants were holding three horses. In a moment all three were in their saddles.

"Do you not intend to return thanks to the abbot?" said the monk to Lupo.

"I am in too great haste to wait now."

Vinciguerra, who had accompanied Lupo to this spot, flung round his neck the silver chain, and took out of his pocket the money he was to have distributed to his comrades.

"Take this," he said; "this belongs to you."

"Keep the money," answered the Limontese, "and drink to my health this evening all together."

"With all my heart, and this time I promise to do you all honor myself. Oh, by-the-by, your silver crucifix, I forgot to return it to you."

"Keep it for yourself—keep it in remembrance of me," replied Lupo, and set off in company with his father and Ottorino.

Poor Ambrose could scarcely believe he really had his son at his side safe and sound.

"You scapegrace! you rash boy!" he said, "you have given me enough frights! now, do as I tell you. Come back home, and live quietly upon the good things God has given you, in company with your mother. Poor thing! how often she has been lamenting that you were not her favorite."

"Oh, I know; I never doubted her love for me."

"But I tell you she is as fond of you now as I am myself; Lauretta and your brother also, though he appears so cold."

"Yes, yes, I am so grateful to them all."

Ottorino, who felt that in this first ebullition of paternal and filial affection, the presence of a third person was superfluous, rode on some paces in front, pretending to attend to something else; but after a time he said to Lupo:

"We shall have to hurry on to be in time for the tournament. You know that this is the first day, and you will like to be my squire."

"Indeed I shall; and—will you believe it?—I thought of it often at Chiaravalle; and one reason I did not approve of the ceremony they were getting ready for me, was that it robbed me of the pleasure of giving you my services in the lists."

"Those polite monks desired your services, but for this once they had to give up their will; and if you could only have seen what a crabbed, frowning face the abbot made when he was reading Marco's letter!"

"Indeed," said Lupo, "it has been a great kindness of that chief—of Marco Visconti."

"It was all for love of our master!" broke in Ambrose; "for our master's sake, who went on purpose to beg it of him, with the young lady."

"I shall always be grateful to the Count," answered the youth, somewhat mortified at finding out that Marco had not thought of him without suggestion, "but, first of all, I must go and thank Marco."

"He departed last night for Tuscany," said Ottorino.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I would have given anything for the honor of kissing his glorious hand, and assuring him that my life will be ever devoted to him."

When they arrived at Milan, the young knight said to Lupo: "In two hours you must be at the lists, and you will find me there;" so saying, he waved his hand to his companions, who answered by bending to their saddle-bows.

When Lupo asked for news of the family he learned that Beatrice was ill with a fever. Ermelinda was nursing her sick child.

"And the Count?"

"He is in his room, and does not wish to see any one."

"But I must return thanks to him."

Mounting a staircase, Lupo crossed five or six rooms, and at last came to the door that led to the master's quarters; and all the rest followed him, wishing to share in the gladness, as they had shared in the trouble. He knocked softly; and the Count, who had guessed who it was, called out:

"Go away; I don't want anyone here."

"Count! master! your honor! it is I, your servant Lupo; let me kiss your hand."

"There, there, go away; that will do."

"I know that you went yourself to obtain from Marco the promise of my safety; pray, let me in."

"Open the door, we implore you!" cried Ambrose.

"Open the door," repeated Marianna, "so that we may embrace your knees!"

"Open the door!" they all cried at once. "Long live the Count del Balzo, our master!"

He was at last conquered by so many entreaties, and opened the door a very little; then peered out through this small opening, with a face half frightened and half triumphant. They all threw themselves at his feet, kissed his hands, thanked him, and wept.

"That's enough," he said to Lupo, "I am glad to see you safe and sound. Now, go away, and take my blessing with you; but remember, never to put your foot again in my house."

Lupo, not knowing what to make of it, went off to array himself in his armor. In a corner of a passage, he came across his sister Lauretta, who, putting her finger to her mouth, said in a low voice:

"You must salute Ottorino in the name of my mistress, Beatrice; and tell him to bear himself bravely in the lists for her sake, and she hopes that absence will not cause him to forget her."

"Absence! What do you mean? Ottorino is not going away, as far as I know."

"No; but he is forbidden by the Count ever to come to this house again."

"But why? what's the reason?"

At that moment footsteps were heard, and Lauretta, again putting her finger on her lips, hurried away.

CHAPTER XVI

GATHERING AT THE LISTS

LUPO, on his way to the monastery of San Simpliciano, close to which the lists were erected, made his way out of the town by the postern gate of Algiso, now called the Ponte Beatrice. The inhabitants were hastening from all quarters to enjoy the pleasures of a spectacle so welcome at that time. There was a constant succession of men, women, and children, all dressed in their smartest clothes.

When our squire arrived in front of the Church of San Simpliciano, which at that time was distant from the enclosed part of the city, he saw the people stopping to look at several shields that were hanging there.

It was the custom to expose on some church, or some cloister in the neighborhood of the lists, the insignia of the knights that were to tilt there, because this practice afforded facility to all to recognize those who bore them on the day of the trial; and because, if there was any notice to affix to any of those about to fight, if any lady or damsel had a claim of honor to make, it could be notified in time to the judges of the tourney, who would exclude the accused if the proofs were deemed sufficient, and the case serious enough to deserve that penalty.

Lupo, after he had glanced at a shield quartered with red and white, with a viper in the midst, which was Ottorino's property, went on his way; and every step he took, the crowd and commotion increased.

Here a minstrel sang to the notes of his cithern; there a buffoon showed off his dogs and monkeys to the sound of a pipe or drum; further on a mountebank sold relics and charms against fever, praising the miraculous virtues of the herbs of San Paolo and Santa Apollonia; on all sides were to be seen tents, in which were going on games of dice and other special games of that age, called "polveretta" and "coreggiola"—games which, though forbidden by law, were practised every day by cheats, to entrap foolish people. Everywhere were to be seen booths, and sheds, and shops, under which was sold flesh of rams and wild boar, garnished in various ways—wheaten, rye, and barley bread; malmsey and white grape wine, and other kinds of liquor and food.

On the left of the lists there was a large square, where were the war horses and those for the tourney; and then were to be heard the shouts of the grooms, who made them gallop, and caracole, and leap within. Close by, two smaller spaces, divided into many enclosures, were given up to the market of dogs and falcons.

"A pair of bloodhounds from Tartary, of the true breed, imported into France by St. Louis!" shouted one. "Dogs of blood, race, and bone, warranted not to go mad!" "Peregrine falcons and sittings of eggs from England, Germany, and Norway!" screamed another. "A gerfalcon hawk, the king of birds, taught to seize hares, and capable of attacking the wolf and wild boar!"

On the opposite side, on the right of the lists, was the market for arms. It was like a camp of tents and awnings of every shape and color. Within, cuirasses, shields, greaves, thigh-pieces, gauntlets, iron caps, and lances, and swords, and iron maces, and daggers.

"Giacomolo, how goes business?" asked Lupo of a fat, red-faced man, who was standing just within one of these shops, with his elbows leaning on the bar across the entrance, looking idly at the passers-by.

"So-so," answered Giacomolo Birago, one of the most celebrated makers of breast-plates; "taking into consideration the bad place I have, and the season, I have not done so badly."

"Have you sent that cuirass to Ottorino?"

"Yes, I took it to him this morning, and he tried it on, and looked quite a picture; I tell you, it is a splendid piece of armor—a thin plate of metal to resist a dagger—tempered by my own hand; and I have adorned it with golden arabesques on the chest, so that I declare to you, not only because it is my own work, but for truth's sake, that Biassono and Pier degli Erminulfi and Estore Casato would have given their heads to get possession of it."

Just then an old man came up covered with a long maroon-colored robe, with a hood on his head, the peak of which was tied round his neck, and said to Giacomolo:

"Master, I want a morion of the first quality, with a closed visor."

"Do you mean by that, fastened down over the face, and opening behind?"

"Exactly."

"Those are old-fashioned articles, and I do not keep them. The morion now is made with a visor to move up and down at the wearer's will. If you want those, I have them. Look here," and he went toward the middle of the shop; but the other said:

"No; do not disturb yourself, master. I want only the shape I spoke of; and where can I find one?"

"You could try yonder—the fourth or fifth shop counting from mine. Can you read?"

"No."

"Well, you can't mistake; only ask for Ambrogio Caimo, and anyone will direct you. He keeps antiques."

"And how much should I pay for it if I find one?"

"Well," answered Birago, drawling his words and shrugging his shoulders, "it is like asking how much a relic is to cost; it may be more or less, according to the devotion of the buyer and the conscience of the vendor."

"What kind of morion does he want?" said Lupo, resuming his conversation with the armorer.

"They are morions," answered Birago, "which were used once on a time, and were worn by persons who wished to fight at a tourney and remain unknown; as they were all in one piece, there was no danger that a stroke with a lance should raise the visor and discover the combatant's face."

"Ah! I understand. Now tell me some news. The Viceroy is not yet arrived, is he?

"No; they are running at the quintain. As soon as he comes the tourney will begin."

"And is he keeping them all waiting?"

"You see what sort of people they are. If only it had been Marco!" And here he heaved a long sigh.

"Oh, if it had but been he!" said the Limontese.

"But why does he go away?" continued the armorer, in a still lower voice. "He ought to stay here, where we are all devoted to him.

"And the soldiers!" said Lupo; "and the nobility! and, indeed, all; but who knows what reason there may be for his going away. I hold it is not so simple as it appears."

Here the colloquy was interrupted by the appearance of the man in the long robe, coming back with a morion in his hand.

"Well, my good man!" cried the armorer, "did you find it?"

"Yes, I found it where you told me."

Birago opened it, looked it minutely over, inside and out, and then said:

"It is an English make; and how much did Caimo make you pay?"

"Guess."

"Eight silver pieces?"

"More."

"An imperial lira?"

"More still."

"Come, tell me then—I can't go any further."

"I paid two gold florins."

"Gold ones?"

"Yes, golden ones, and one was thirty imperial pence."

"What a thief!" the armorer began, but he bit his tongue, and restoring the morion to the unknown man, added, "I must say that whoever has two florins to throw away on these old bits of iron must measure them by the bushel."

"In whose service are you?" asked Lupo, innocently and unceremoniously of the unknown; but he put his fingers on his lips, and went off.

"This is for some one to wear who wishes to appear incognito at the joust to-morrow," said the armorer.

After another journey through the crowd, Lupo arrived at one end of the lists, divided by scaffolding and wooden turrets of various heights on the side of the city, and by a simple barrier on the opposite side, which was toward the woods.

Lupo entered, and saw the boarding covered with garlands and flags, adorned with carpets, silks, cloths of gold and silver; saw knights, and ladies, and gentle damsels sitting in front, and farther back squires and foot-pages: everywhere he saw plumes wave, hats and hoods tossing, and weapons and jewels shining. A large balcony, with pillars hung with white satin worked in gold, still untenanted in the midst of such a concourse, was intended for the Imperial Viceroy and his court.

In the middle of the large space within the barriers, on a pillar was a half figure of an armed warrior, with a shield on its left arm, and a large and solid lance on the right; and to strike at this figure was the ambition of anyone who could get a horse to mount, and who wished to show off, and this was called running the quintain, or running the Saracen, for the figure was dressed in the Moorish fashion.

When the figure did not receive a fair thrust with the lance, a spring was touched, when, by means of certain ingenious hidden weights, it was made to turn violently upon its pivot, and to deal the inexpert champion a series of unexpected blows.

At the opposite end of the lists from the quintain was a wooden horse. A post as thick as the trunk of a tree was planted in the ground, on which, with an iron swivel, a beam was laid crosswise which swung round at the slightest touch. A man on horseback, riding at full tilt, had to strike one end of the beam with his lance, and the art consisted in avoiding, by rapid riding, the counter blow dealt by the other end of the beam as it swung round on its axis. This game was often highly perilous, and had, on that account, in common with the jousts and tourneys, been forbidden by bishops, popes, and councils, but bishops, popes, and councils spent their breath in vain.

Lupo had presented himself before Ottorino, had fastened on him Birago's new breast-plate, had given a most minute examination to every part of the armor, looking again carefully at the horse, the caparisons, the panoply; and when he had ascertained that everything was right, he entered the squires' pavilion, at one end of the lists, and stood to observe those that were running the quintain. Just then he saw a man come up dressed from head to foot, half in red and half in yellow, so that, seen from the right side, he was all one color, but seen from the left, another: a fashion that was common in those times; but it was unusual to see it accompanied, as it was, in the person of whom we are speaking, by a row of silver bells hung round his hat.

"Welcome, Tremacoldo," said our squire, when the other had come near enough for him to recognize in him the buffoon, by whom the arms had been blessed at the ordeal by battle.

"Is it you, Lupo? I am glad to have found you. I was coming to the squires' tents to see if any one would lend me a breast-plate and a horse to run a bout at the Saracen: so, perhaps, you will do me this kindness?"

"Do you mean to ride at the Saracen? You are in joke. I advise you to mind what you are doing, for it is not quite the same thing as singing a song. Look at that partisan in his hand!"

"He may strike whom he pleases, I don't care, for I have a wager with Arnaldo Vitale: he carried away the palm in a minstrels' contest, and I have challenged him to a contest at the Saracen."

"But do you not know that Arnaldo Vitale is a squire, and that he understands charging with the lance as well as the first jousters?"

"But you do not know the terms of the challenge? He has to break his lance on the Saracen, and I am to conquer by only touching it, without being struck by the stick in its hand."

"So it is not, then, to be on equal terms?"

"Equal terms! No. I may be mad, but I am not mad enough for that."

"And are you not ashamed?"

"Of what? to gain without trouble a fine horse?"

"And what do you wager?"

"I wager a piece of that gold chain which your master gave me at Bellano; the rest I have lost at the gaming-table."

"Poor chain, and your poor shoulders! well, do as you please."

"So, you will lend me this horse and this breast-plate?

"For one trial only."

"That is understood."

"Come inside, then, and I will put you up to everything."

Having arrayed him in a light corselet with his trusty rest fastened to his chest, Lupo mounted the buffoon on his own horse, and put into his hand a lance. "This is only for practice," he said to him; "drive the thrust from there," and he showed him the rest. "Remember to keep your knees tight, to bend forward in your saddle, so that the blow does not throw you from your horse; so, a little more this way, hold the lance tight, throw out your arms more; try to strike in the right place, and recommend yourself to your patron saint."

"Leave it to me," replied Tremacoldo.

"Wait to put on your spurs," Lupo cried.

"I will do without," answered the buffoon.

A trumpeter making the round of the barriers announced the challenge between Arnaldo Vitale and Tremacoldo, and then the terms in which it was couched.

When the pledges were placed in the hands of the judges, two grooms dressed in bearskin, and imitating in their movements the animals they represented, approached the competitors to present to each a lance; but while Tremacoldo was stretching out his hand to take his, the horse he rode pricked up its ears, dilated its panting nostrils, snuffed shyly and fiercely at the bearskin, then, starting back, reared so that the poor rider very nearly was thrown off; he saw himself in danger, stuck his knees into the saddle, and threw his arms round the neck of the animal. Lupo, arriving at that crisis, took the horse by the bridle, calling him by his name, caressing his head, patting him on the neck and side, and soon made him as quiet as a lamb.

When the laughter had subsided, the herald cried: "Call Arnaldo Vitale."

And there was the troubadour, who, clothed in armor, with a bright cuirass and the silver spurs, the distinctive mark of a squire, now sped across the field, threw himself on the Saracen, and struck it right in the center of the shield with such an impetus that the whole machine shook, and the lance was broken in pieces. This was the third that had been broken that day, but none had yet struck the *brocco,* that is to say, the iron point which was in the center of the shield, called on that account *brocchiere;* and so it was decreed this was the best thrust.

The herald shouted, *Imbroccato,* and there was a general sound of applause.

In another moment the multitude began to cry out, "Now for Tremacoldo."

"I am here, I am not going to run away," replied the buffoon.

"Quick, put your lance in rest," said Lupo. But the cheat, who did not care to run a desperate race for nothing, instead of putting the lance in rest, passed it under his arm, and started off toward the goal, all of a heap in his saddle.

Arrived at the goal, he gave a thrust with his lance, immediately entangling it in the folds of the purple mantle in which the figure of the Saracen was draped. It was not a fair blow, and consequently the lay figure, unaccustomed to such treatment, revolved with a sudden noisy motion on its pivot, and the staff that it carried in its hand seemed about to fall with a furious blow on the back of the inexpert rider. The jester, as soon as he had given the thrust with his lance, flung himself prone on the horse's neck, so that the staff only caught the top of his hat, whirling it away to an immense distance, amid the delighted jeers of the multitude. As soon as he had got out of reach of his enemy, Tremacoldo raised himself from his cramped position, turned his horse's head, and rode back again straight up to the figure of the Saracen, and proceeded to accost it with taunts and gibes.

"You idiot! you thought to play me a trick, eh, you dog? but Tremacoldo is too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

"Tremacoldo," said one of the judges "according to the terms of the wager, you have lost."

"How can I have lost if the stick did not touch me?"

"Look at your hat on the ground, which bears witness against you," replied the judge.

"What has my hat to do with me? my hat is a tricky fellow, and if it takes it into its head to go tumbling on the ground, is it my fault?"

The judge was about to reply, but Arnaldo Vitale, pleased with the success of his stroke, came between them, saying:

"Tremacoldo is right; we spoke of his person and not of his hat;" then, turning to the man himself: "take the horse, which is yours."

The troubadour was awarded a sword with a silver hilt.

The Imperial Viceroy, Azzone, arrived in company with his uncles Luchino and Giovanni Visconti, and a splendid court of barons, squires, and pages. He had hardly shown himself to the people, when arose a few cries of "Long live Azzone! Long live the Viceroy, the Lord of Milan!" But it was a cold demonstration; a dull murmur soon drowned those voices, and, at last, from some spots was to be heard a clear and distinct cry of—"Hurrah for Marco!" so that Luchino, after looking round, bent down to his nephew's ear, and said:

"It is lucky for us that we have got rid of him for some time."

Naturally gentle and pleasant, Azzone made still more show of kindness and courtesy in order to win over the populace, who he knew were not too well inclined to him.

Azzone, having caught sight of Arnaldo Vitale, presented his own sword to the judge of the quintain, and buckling on the one that had been gained as a prize, turned to one of his squires, and said:

"Attend to me, Lampugnano; go down into the lists, and bring me that troubadour who won the prize of the quintain."

While the young man was obeying his orders, the Viceroy said to his two uncles, between whom he stood:

"While they are clearing the ground, and the champions are preparing for the tourney, we will have some singing."

Luchino made an indifferent gesture; but his brother Giovanni, who had just been made a Cardinal, and who was devoted to show and pomp, and all the luxury of the secular life of that time, asked his nephew:

"Tell me whether this is the Arnaldo Vitale who won at Tolosa the prize of the golden viol."

"The very same," assured Azzone.

Then the prelate began to tell wonderful things of him, for he had heard him praised in all the courts of Italy, and knew some of his songs by heart.

At the time of our story the troubadours, minstrels, and jesters, who swarmed over Europe, were for the most part an idle race, who, roaming from country to town with a lute or cithern round their necks, attended all festivities, visited every palace and city, and excited the foolish prodigality of nobles and princes. In times when the communication between towns and provinces was slow and difficult, they carried about the news of public events and private affairs: a great deal of slander and gossip; the latest fashions in weapons, tourneys, and love affairs; they sang of the glories and betrayed the foibles of the great.

Among them were some honest men, and some good poets, and Arnaldo Vitale was one of them.

He appeared in the Viceroy's balcony, dressed as a troubadour, for he had laid aside his breast-plate and other armor, and had arrayed himself in a doublet and leggings of blue and white. He wore on his head a square blue cap, with two white feathers, which shaded his left cheek. He appeared to be about thirty years of age; with his head covered with rich, soft, chestnut locks, and a calm and rather stern expression of countenance.

The party in the Viceroy's balcony drew round him at once, and those in the neighboring erections stretched forward to hear him. He looked round the noble circle, and then bowing to Azzone, asked him for a subject.

"I have often heard my father," said the Viceroy, "who was in France for some time, recall the adventures of one Folchetto di Provenza, who, though only the son of a smith, became Count of Narbonne, and then died a friar in a Spanish convent. You must know all the particulars, as you have been in those parts; how will it suit you to sing me this history in verse?"

"I will do all that is in my power to obey, though I am but an unworthy instrument in the hands of so great a lord," answered Arnaldo; and hanging round his neck the lute which he held in his hand, he touched the cords, and said—"I must supply the tune and the words," which meant to improvise both music and poetry.

Then he began by soft preludes to prepare the listeners for that kind of emotion which he wished to arouse by his verses; and in the mean time he appeared absorbed as one meditating, turning his eyes upward, and his cheeks glowing, his brow seeming to expand to his imagination; his whole being was agitated by the workings of his mind. There was a deep silence, all were looking at the poet with respectful attention; and now, accompanied by a soft melody on the lute, he sang his song in a voice at first not quite assured, but which soon became pleasant and sweet.

CHAPTER XVII

A TOURNAMENT

WHEN the minstrel had finished his song, and departed, Azzone took his seat on the dais, which was the signal for beginning the tournament. The arena had been cleared of the populace, who had been allowed to go in and out at will as long as the quintain and the other games were going on; the bars had been let down inside the lists, and a herald rode round, uttering at each of the four sides of the arena the following proclamation:

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! This is the proclamation of the high and mighty Lord Azzone, Viceroy of his Serene Majesty, the Emperor of the Romans. Let no one dare to enter the lists during the tournament, or to favor or disfavor any of the combatants by deed, word, or sign, under pain of forfeiting horse and armor, if the offender be knight or squire; of losing an ear, if he be artisan or laborer; a hand, if he be a slave; and his life, if he be a knave or a felon."

This done, the six judges of the tournament, clad in long silken robes, took their seats in a gallery near the Viceregal box, in front of which was displayed a banner, embroidered with gold and scarlet quarterings.

Not a sound was to be heard in all that vast multitude; the parapets of the towers, the galleries and the boxes were crowded with spectators, while the barricades round the lists, where no seats had been erected, swarmed with people surging and treading one upon another; and all eyes were directed in turn to the opposite ends of the lists, where two pairs of magnificent tents had been pitched, those on the Viceroy's right being scarlet, and those on his left white.

But now a flourish of trumpets was heard, and from the two white pavilions issued twelve knights clad in white surcoats, with white plumes in their helmets, and the same number of squires, with green stripes on their doublets, while from the opposite pavilions came an equal number of knights and squires with red surcoats and plumes, and yellow livery respectively.

At the head of the white troop was our friend Ottorino; and the red one was led by a young Milanese warrior named Sacramoro. The two parties that were to fight with blunted lances—arms of courtesy, as they were called—now advanced slowly toward each other, and stopping before the Viceroy's box, saluted him by lowering the points of their lances.

Their richly-caparisoned chargers had iron horns on their foreheads, and rows of bells suspended from their breastplates. Each knight had his family colors emblazoned on his shield, in some fantastic device, with his crest and past feats of arms, so as to be better distinguished in the *mêlée*. Besides this, each man wore a strip of taffeta, of different colors. Some carried it fastened on their side, others on their shoulder-belt; it was called the lady's favor, as it was, or was supposed to be, a gift from the knight's lady-love, toward whom, according to the rules of chivalry, every one had to turn his thoughts before engaging in any dangerous enterprise, so as to give himself courage to come out of the affair with honor.

After saluting the Viceroy, the two companies wheeled off to right and left, till they arrived at their respective ends of the lists, whence they returned halfway down the course, halted, and saluted each other. Their noble chargers champed their bits, as if eager for the fray, while their riders with their visors down, and lances erect, came forward in a serried mass with their respective leaders slightly in advance. Their helmets, cuirasses, and shields, adorned with gold and silver badges, gleamed brightly in the rays of the mid-day sun, and the housings and caparisons of their chargers flaunted out to the public gaze as they turned along the course, and plumes, banners, and streamers floated in the wind.

Our knowing armorer, as soon as he saw the arrival of the Viceroy, left his shop in the charge of an apprentice, and ran to the left side of the barrier, near the two white pavilions, where his wife was expecting him.

A place had been kept for him by half a dozen of his workmen, who cleared a way for him as soon as the plumed cap of the master armorer was seen above the crowd, so that he was soon seated by his wife's side, his elbows leaning on the barrier.

"Look, it fits him like a glove," said Birago to one of his young men, pointing to Ottorino's cuirass, who was just then passing in front of them.

The young man was on the point of answering, but the armorer's wife, interrupting him, seized her husband's arm, saying, "Tell me, Giacomolo, who is that knight, the third in the ranks? Is he blind of one eye that he keeps it bandaged like that? He looks too smartly got up for fighting."

"His sight is as good as either of ours," replied the armorer. "I know him well: his name is Bronzino Caimo, one of those Caimi who once lived at Saint Ambrogio, and now reside near Broletto Nuovo; I will tell you the history of that bandaged eye. He once made love to a lady of the Lampugnani family, who would have nothing to do with him, he was such a poor simpleton; so, in order to get rid of him for a while, she gave him to understand that she could not bear the sight of a booby whom no one outside our walls knew anything about. She told him this in somewhat politer terms than these, but it came to the same thing—so what do you think the poor fool did? He lay in wait for the lady as she was walking one evening in her garden, plumped down on his knees before her, and taking one of her hands, shut his own eye with it, and then swore never again to open it till he had unhorsed three knights; and that he would never again appear in her presence but with two eyes open, that is, till he had fulfilled his vow."

"What curious vows!" exclaimed Birago's wife. "And do they still bind him?"

"Certainly they do, and on the strength of them, even he has become a man of some mark, and goes about the country picking quarrels in all directions. The consequence is, that he has been unhorsed no end of times. Once was his shoulder put out, another time he came home with a broken arm, and a third time with his ribs stove in; but on he goes, storming and hammering away, till in the course of three years or three years and a half, he has just managed to unhorse two knights; and as he never misses the chance of a fight, here he is again, and if he succeeds in emptying a third saddle, he will unbandage his eye and present himself to his mistress, who cannot then do less than permit his addresses."

Meanwhile the band of red knights came trooping past our couple. Its leader, Sacramoro, displayed beneath his helmet a visage well bronzed by the sun and set off by a pair of truculent eyes. His mouth and left cheek were disfigured by a deep scar extending to his chin, while his broad chest and shoulders made him look very formidable, on a Macedonian charger, with the mien of a man accustomed to greater dangers than these.

"Look! look!" said Birago, "there goes one of the first lances in the Milanese; he has seen service in Germany, France, and Palestine."

"I prefer the leader of the white knights," replied his wife. "He seems quite as good a man as the other, and certainly looks more of a Christian."

"He is a noble young fellow, too," said her husband; "he, too, was fitted out at my armory; but I can tell you that fellow Sacramoro will give him a tough bone to crack."

"But why do those two men," asked the lady, pointing to the white knights, who were drawn up in line in front of the pavilions, "carry shields of one color without any quarterings?"

"That means that they are novices; in default of some special act of prowess they are bound, for the first year of their knighthood, to wear their shields so, of a single color and smooth. But hush! they are about to begin."

At the first sound of the trumpets, the knights, who were drawn up in lines at each end of the lists, all lowered their visors together; at the second, they placed their lances in rest; and at the third, both parties, uttering their respective cries of San Ambrogio, and Ottorino, and San Giorgio, and Sacramoro, set off at full speed from either end, and encountered each other in the middle of the arena with a noise like thunder. In a moment lances were shivered, knights unhorsed, horses charging each other breast to breast, or biting and striking out with their forefeet, and then galloping off all over the course with empty saddles and dangling reins; while from the *mêlée* arose a cloud of blinding dust, from which proceeded a confused mass of cries of triumph, rage, encouragement, and command. Soon afterward grooms came running up to catch the loose horses, squires to assist their lords to remount, and inferior attendants to help some disabled man out of the *mêleé;* while the outside of the lists resounded with the exclamations and applause of the spectators, who were eagerly asking which side had the best of it.

The knights now discarded their lances, and drew their swords, called *di marra* because they had neither point nor edge. They were formidable weapons, however, and when brought down on a helmet by arms that knew no other trade, were quite heavy enough, if the blow was well aimed, to break the head inside, or, at least, to make the wearer stagger for a good while. Meanwhile the heralds, umpires, and clerks of the course, who kept vigilant watch on the combatants to see that they fought fairly, and did their duty, were incessantly calling out to them to remember whose sons they were, and not to show themselves degenerate.

The combat lasted more than an hour, with varying fortune; but at last the white party appeared to have had the worst of it. Four of them had been borne to the tents severely wounded, while their comrades, hard pressed by the enemy, continued slowly to retreat. The Viceroy, thinking it was all over with them, and wishing to avoid further bloodshed, was on the point of giving the signal that the fighting should cease, when Ottorino, calling Beatrice and her message to mind, and burning with rage and shame, threw his shield behind him, clutched his sword desperately with both hands, and charged the leader of the red party, crying out: "Look to yourself, Sacramoro!"

The threatened man at once threw up his broad buckler over his head, and directed an ineffectual sword-thrust at his adversary's cuirass. The latter, however, seeing from his opponent's style of defense that a direct blow at the head would be of no use, lowered his sword instead of raising it, and making a furious cross cut, struck Sacramoro on the right cheek-piece of his helmet with such force that he was knocked clean off his horse, and had to be carried off to the red tent with a broken jaw, and little more than alive.

On this, hearing Ottorino's battle-cry of San Ambrogio, the defeated party took heart, while their hitherto victorious adversaries lost courage and began to give way. Our young hero, meanwhile, dealt sweeping blows around, with loud shouts, and was well supported by his companions to the utmost of their power. In an instant the whole aspect of affairs was changed; two more of the red faction were unhorsed, while those who still kept in their saddles, deprived of their leader as a rallying-point, wandered about the lists in disorder, continually pursued and wounded by their adversaries; and as it was now plain that all further defense was useless, the Viceroy gave the signal, the trumpets sounded, and the tournament came to an end.

While the crowd outside were uttering various cries, clapping their hands, and throwing hats and handkerchiefs into the air, by way of applause and welcome to the victorious party, seven or eight of the heralds and umpires were seen to ride at full speed after one of the red knights, and drive him out of the lists with the butt-end of a lance; a punishment always inflicted, according to the laws of the tourney, on anyone who did not at once cease fighting when the signal was given.

Such of the combatants as were able to sit upright in their saddles, or stand on their legs, presented themselves one by one, as their names were called by a herald, before the judges' box, and according to the testimony borne by the various officials of the tourney, it was adjudged that all had comported themselves like good and loyal knights; two only excepted, one of the white faction who was charged with having run his lance into his adversary's thigh, which was a foul stroke, as not having been placed between the four limbs, as the saying ran; and the other, one of the red faction, accused of having wounded a horse. As to the first, however, he was cleared from blame by the very man who had received the wound, who proved that the thrust was really aimed at his shield, but that the lance-head glanced off and struck a different part from what was evidently intended. The other managed to escape by getting one of the clerks of the course to swear that his competitor's horse raised its head just as he was delivering his sword-cut.

The last names called were those of the men in the tents, of whom there were ten; seven wounded, and three dead—and it was decided that they had all comported themselves in a worthy and valiant manner.

But the most unlucky of all the wounded men, without having received very serious maltreatment, was our friend Bronzino Caimo, the hero of the bandaged eye. At the first encounter a lance point penetrated through the opening left in the visor to see through, right into the unbandaged eye, which was the only one he could use. So being thus blinded and unhorsed, he was led off to the tent, where nothing could induce him to allow the bandage to be removed from the other eye, which still remained sound. The matter was then referred to the judges, who did not know how to settle it; and for some time afterward it afforded a subject for hot and acrimonious discussion among the knights and ladies, who called it a pretty question—just as we sometimes hear a barrister say, this is a splendid case—or a doctor, this is an interesting disease. The question was laid before all the principal Courts of Love in Europe, and was decided in all sorts of ways, till on a final appeal to the Supreme Court of Provence, sentence was at last given in favor of Caimo's eye, namely, that he might be allowed to unbandage it. So after about three years, during which time he had remained totally blind, our timorous lover at last removed the fatal bandage and saw daylight again; on which he returned to his former avocation of trying to unhorse his third knight in fulfilment of his vow. At last, by good luck, he knocked his man over. What joy! But you will hardly believe that his wretch of a mistress, who did not care to be attended by a one-eyed lover, got off on another tack, and told him coolly, that his promise was, not to appear in her presence again but with two eyes open, and as he now had but one, she did not wish to see him again.

The novice knights presented the heralds of the camp with the helmets they had worn in the field; but here arose a new difficulty, inasmuch as one of the novices had broken a lance in a passage of arms held at Como a short time before, and there were some who held that he was not required to give his helmet to the heralds, as this was not his first feat of arms. It was decided that the helmet was due, because the combat in which he had taken part before was only a skirmish, that is, a joust, in which the sword was not used; and the famous maxim was now enunciated with respect to jousts and tourneys, that the sword frees the lance, but not the lance the sword.

The white faction were declared to be the victors, and the votes having been collected not only of the judges and officers of the tournament, but also of the ladies and damsels, it was decided that Ottorino had proved himself the most valiant knight, and the prize was adjudged him —viz., a white charger, with white trappings, and a silver helmet and shield.

CHAPTER XVIII

MORTAL COMBAT

THE news of the tournament and its results was brought to the Count Balzo that evening by the advocate Lorenzo Garbagnate. Beatrice, who felt half dead with the fright of the night before, and the misery of the whole of that day spent in conjuring up all possible dangers for Ottorino, listened with intense anxiety to every word, and derived new life from what she heard. But when she heard how the young conqueror, after his victory, reverently kissed a blue ribbon hanging from his side, as a proof that the thought of his lady had mainly contributed to his success, the girl, full of love for him, and fairly broken down by her joy, withdrew a little from the crowd, and covering her face with her hands, gave full vent to her tears. After her return to the company, she often that evening felt her cheeks tingle at hearing the beloved name in every one's mouth; and murmuring to herself, "He is mine!" her bosom swelled with maidenly exultation.

The knights and ladies assembled that evening at the Count's house, were greatly surprised at his non-appearance at the tournament. So overwhelmed was the poor man by the idea of Marco's omnipresence, that he was incapable of sharing his daughter's delight at Ottorino's victory.

But by degrees his spirit and courage began to return, and an event occurred that finally dissipated the dark clouds that still hung over him. This was the arrival of an old baron of his acquaintance, who took him aside at once, and informed him that the Viceroy had been inquiring for him.

"What! did he really ask for me?" anxiously inquired the vain, timid man.

"He wished to know where you were."

"But what was his actual expression?"

"He asked why you were not at the tournament?"

"Then I must certainly attend the joust to-morrow; that is the day fixed for it, is it not?"

"Yes, the jousting is to take place the second day, and I think you had better go; for if not, perhaps, you understand, as you are such a friend of Marco's, it might be thought that you are not friendly to the Viceroy."

"How! what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing in particular; but everyone knows that between Marco and the Viceroy no love is lost."

"I know nothing of that; I am a friend to all, and wish to live at peace with everybody."

"That is just why you must go to-morrow; it is a *fête* to celebrate the appointment of Azzone; and if he should happen to ask for you again, and find you were not there"—

"Oh, I will come, you may depend upon it."

The next day he appeared before anyone else in a balcony hard by the Viceroy's box; the lists had not been put in order, nor had the combatants arrived, but there stood the Count, with his daughter and a large suite of squires and pages.

When the Viceroy and his two uncles showed themselves in their box, the Count tried to attract their attention by taking off his hat, bowing, and waving his hand, but no one took any notice of him, or appeared to distinguish between his civilities and those of the rest of the spectators.

The joust now began. Several knights came forward to touch the different shields hanging near the pavilions of the champions. Single combats then took place, but nothing occurred worthy of notice; some of the knights ran a tilt in the air, others lost a stirrup, and so on.

Ottorino was not once summoned into the lists; for after his exploits of the previous day no one cared to measure weapons with him.

The spectacle had lasted two hours, and was becoming so dull that the lookers-on were quite weary and disgusted with it, and began to grumble and curse the knights for not having the courtesy to show sport.

It having now become necessary to appease the spectators, the heralds came forward crying out that the joust would now cease, and proclaimed a *bigordo;* such being the name given to an assault on a bastion or wooden castle, which was one of the favorite military spectacles of the time. But as they were about to utter the formula used to put an end to all challenges, the sound of a horn was heard from a wood close by. The spectators knew that this portended the entrance of a new knight into the lists, and, after a short interval of silence, through the barriers entered a tall, large man, with his visor down, clad *cap-à-pie* in steel armor, but colorless, and devoid of any ornament or device; he bestrode a large, coal-black stallion, with a white star on its forehead and three white stockings.

The new comer had suspended on his saddle-bow a shield, as smooth and plain as the rest of his armor, but behind him rode a squire with another buckler, covered with somber-colored silk as a badge of mourning. Leaving his master at the end of the lists next to the wood, the squire crossed the ground to convey the shield to the judges' tent, which was on the opposite side. The judges were bound by a solemn oath never, on any pretence, to reveal the secret of any knight who might wish to fight *incognito*, but they were equally obliged to examine his coat-of-arms, and determine whether he deserved the honor of measuring weapons with the other champions.

The judges soon came out with the buckler of the unknown knight, which had been again covered up; and after hanging it on the head of a lance fixed in the ground, they did obeisance to it, and gave the sign to a herald, who cried, with a loud voice, "Sir knight, you are free of the lists."

Then the unknown knight passed down the enclosure at a foot's pace till he came to the tent of the keepers of the lists, when, stopping before Ottorino's shield, instead of touching it, as usual, with his lance, he pulled it down from its place and threw it on the ground; he then hung it up again, but topsy-turvy, which was the greatest insult that could be offered to a knight, and meant a challenge *in tutto transito,* or in other words, to mortal combat.

Beatrice who had seen the many bloodless assaults, at last ardently wished for some occasion for her knight to exhibit his prowess. But when she heard the blast of the trumpet, and saw the unknown knight arrive, she was struck with a secret foreboding, and trembled from head to foot, as she seemed to hear a voice within her crying out, "Woe to thy betrothed!" So while this terrible knight was crossing the lists and drawing near the pavilion, she kept looking at him with the panic fear of a child, who thinks he sees a ghost coming slowly at him in the dark, and when she heard the shield fall to the ground, her eyes swam, and she was hardly in her senses.

Her father observing this, took her by the arm and tried to persuade her to leave the scene; but she refused to follow him.

"Do you not know who the person challenged is?" said the Count, in an agitated voice.

"I do; it is Ottorino," replied the girl.

"But the arms," stammered her father; "but the challenge"—

"The arms are pointed and edged," replied Beatrice. "The challenge is to mortal combat, I saw it all; but I will not stir from here."

Ottorino issued from the tent armed *cap-à-pie;* he came up to his charger, which Lupo held for him, placed one hand on the saddle-bow, and, heavily weighted as he was, with one spring vaulted into his saddle.

The umpires then brought two pointed lances, with ponderous oaken shafts bound with silver rings and iron butts; and having carefully examined them to make sure that they were exactly alike in every respect, they presented one to each of the combatants, ordering them at the same time to make the circuit of the arena.

The two competitors riding side by side, each with his squire behind him, now began to look round them, as they passed the barrier in front of the spectators. The unknown knight, thoroughly concealed by his armor, guided with a gay and careless air his powerful charger, which, excited by the shouts of applause, kept rearing and plunging, and champed impetuously its foaming bit; its rider maintaining a firm and upright seat in his saddle, with a stern, majestic carriage.

Lupo, who rode a little behind him, was awestruck at the magnificent breadth of his shoulders, the fine proportions of his limbs, and his proud, noble bearing, and could not help feeling some apprehension for his master's safety. On a closer observation he recognized the helmet as having been purchased the day before at the shop by the old man with the maroon-colored robe.

Ottorino cantered along by the side of his gigantic opponent, with his visor up, which displayed the clusters of black hair playing about his fine, open countenance. He bestrode a beautiful chestnut jennet from Andalusia, which, though not so massive and formidable as his antagonist's charger, yet was full of fire and intelligence, and obeyed at once his master's slightest sign, whether of hand or voice. His rider managed him with great skill, making him prance and curvet so gracefully as they moved along, that one would suppose they were going to a review or carousal, rather than preparing for mortal combat.

On arriving opposite Count Balzo's box, Ottorino courteously saluted both father and daughter, but the former hardly seemed to see him, and even Beatrice only responded with a shy and fugitive glance; for at that moment, as if urged by an evil genius, she could not take her eyes off his mysterious adversary.

The unknown challenger, who had ridden with his eyes straight before him, inclined his head slightly toward the gallery where the Count was sitting.

When the combatants had completed the circuit, the ground was cleared for the contest, and the earth and sun, as the saying was, were equally divided between them; that is, they were placed opposite each other in such a position as to be equi-distant from the center of the arena, and so that the sun's rays should shine at equal advantage or disadvantage for both.

The immense crowd awaited the combat in silence, and the trumpets were about to give the signal, when an event took place that all but overthrew the tottering power of Azzone.

Lupo, who stood behind Ottorino, taking a chance motion of the Viceroy's hand for a signal for the assault, cried out in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the arena, *"Viva Marco Visconti!"* which was his master's ordinary war-cry, who, hearing it, lifted his gauntleted hand and repeated it himself. However, neither he nor his opponent attempted to move, as they had not yet heard the trumpet sound; but the spectators, most of whom were secret adherents of the Visconti faction, and had a hazy idea that something was in the wind, supposed that cry was a preconcerted signal for a rising against the Viceroy. In an instant thousands of voices took it up from all directions, while numbers felt for their arms, and collected in groups, asking what it all meant, and looking round to find some leader. If Marco had shown himself to them just then, all would have been over. The small bodyguard of the Viceroy drew together around his box, and for a moment both he and his uncles gave themselves up for lost.

While the tumult was at its height, the great unknown, who had never moved from his post, raised his hand to his helmet, and seemed to be trying to raise his visor, as if forgetting that this was impossible. He lowered his arm at once, and placing his closed fist on his iron thigh-piece, he stood contemplating the scene through the eyelet-holes of his helmet.

The heralds and officials ran about crying out to the people to keep silence, and go back to their places; till by degrees the tempest began to blow over, and at last passed off altogether.

When silence was restored, the trumpets sounded, and the combatants advanced toward each other, with their heads bent down behind their shields, leaving nothing visible but their eyes.

The unknown knight, who intended to strike a dextrous blow with his lance at the first onset, instead of spurring his horse and urging him on at easy pace, put him at once into a mad gallop, and when he came within reach he presented his shield sidewise to his adversary, who attacked him with such fury that the lance, on striking it, glided off from the polished steel without leaving any mark, and merely grazed his side in passing; while he himself, looking fixedly at the blue scarf which Ottorino wore that day over his shoulder, ran it through with his lance and succeeded in pulling it off his back.

This preconcerted and masterly stroke was not understood by the spectators, who, supposing it was done by accident, began to grumble as if it had been a foul blow. But the combatants no sooner had passed each other than they wheeled their horses round, on arriving at the point whence they had originally started respectively, and again furiously charged. The unknown knight came on this time at full speed, and pressed his knees so tightly into his charger's flanks that it could scarcely breathe. When they came together, Ottorino broke his lance on the edge of his adversary's shield, who did not move in his saddle, but struck the young man straight on the visor with such force that he felled him to the ground a whole lance's length from his horse, which, feeling the load off his croup, stopped all of a sudden and looked round, as if expecting his master to remount. But his unlucky master lay on his back on the sand without a sign of life. Lupo at once leaped from his horse, tremblingly opened his visor, and found blood flowing from his nose, mouth and ears. Two attendants came out, took off his helmet, and carried him in their arms to the tent; his legs were hanging loose, and his head swung about at every step, with his bloodstained locks floating in the wind.

In a few moments a herald came out of the pavilion and announced that Ottorino was alive.

On this the victor, who, still ensconced in his helmet, had accompanied the wounded man to the tent, and had remained near at hand ever since he saw him go in, raised his hand to heaven, and sat upright in his saddle in an attitude signifying his delight at hearing the announcement; then throwing down his lance, he set spurs to his horse, and galloped out of the lists into the wood whence he had come. His squire, having taken the shield with the lance to which it was fastened, carried it behind him.

When the lance thrown down by the knight who had disappeared, was picked up, it was found that the iron head was broken off. Most of the spectators thought this had been done in the encounter, but there was one man who had noticed that the unknown knight, on first hearing his adversary call out, *"Viva Marco,"* had gone up to one of the boxes, stuck his lance-head between two boards and using the shaft as a lever, had broken it off halfway. Everybody agreed that if the lance had been whole, the force of the blow was such that it would have pierced the visor, and gone right through the head of the wounded man.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LORD OF LUCCA

A MONTH later the scene of our story was transferred to the city of Lucca, which had become subject to Marco Visconti.

The Emperor, forced to abandon Tuscany, as his own schemes and those of the anti-Pope had failed, before taking leave had endeavored to wring all the profits he could out of that country; and, among other fine plans, one of the most feasible had been to sell cities friendly to him for ready money. This amiable scheme was especially applied to Lucca. The faithless Bavarian had taken it away from the sons of Castruccio, his powerful partisan, in order to give it to Francesco Castracani degl'Interminelli, who paid in ready money for it a wonderful number of thousands of gold florins. But the people of Lucca, who did not approve of having been bought and sold like a flock of sheep, deserted the Emperor's cause, and threw themselves upon Marco's protection, who had arrived some time before at Ceruglio, and had gained over that band of revolted Germans. Visconti arrived with six hundred soldiers to aid those of Lucca, sent Castracani to the rightabout, and was elected lord and captain of the city which he had delivered from an odious yoke; of a city which gave itself up willingly to a prince of illustrious birth, of distinguished reputation, who had been a close friend of the famous Castruccio, under whose government Lucca had become so formidable.

The sixth day since that event had now arrived. Marco was still employing his followers in receiving the voluntary submissions of many of the estates and castles around, and in overrunning, devastating, and burning those that had refused obedience; and already he had entered into a new compact with Count Fazio, to begin at Pisa the same game he had played at Lucca, and to take that city out of the hands of Messer Tarlatino di Pietra Mala, to whom the Bavarian had given it up.

It was now late, and having taken leave of the counselors and nobility of his new Court, Visconti was pacing up and down a vast hall in the palace of the municipality, inhabited a few months before by his celebrated friend Castruccio. He turned his eyes from time to time toward a Gothic window, which looked on the square, whence he could see towers and domes shining with a brilliant light; far below, in the square, a bonfire spread abroad a red and flickering flame over the people who swarmed around, feasting, reveling, and singing lays and ballads in praise of the new chieftain.

Marco stopped for a moment to gaze on this spectacle, then turning from the window he raised his eyes to a picture of Castruccio, on the wall above the chimney, and this sight spoiled his pleasure and dispersed the enchantment. He said to himself:

"At Rome, when he was the right hand of the Emperor, full of life and vigor; when all the Guelph cities, and King Robert, and the Pope, trembled at his name; when I was so proud of being his friend, and hoped by his help to obtain the lordship of Milan; suppose a soothsayer had come to him, and said: 'Castruccio, in a few months all will be over, and you will be under the earth!' What an announcement to one fresh in age and strength, in the prime of his power! Yet life is uncertain and frail, and he, of course, knew himself to be mortal; but if that conjuror had said: 'Do you see him who stands at your side? The man whom you honor and esteem as a brother; this same Marco, who has done all in his power to aid you to rise to the height at which you are: do you mark him? Now know that he before long will be lord in your city, that your house will be his, and that your widow and your sons will be wandering from land to land, seeking an asylum that will be denied them, and he will obtain their inheritance. What a poor creature man is! An illustrious and powerful city falls into my lap in one moment, while the efforts of many years to make myself master of another, which flies me like a phantom, are vain."

He went again to the window, and exclaimed:

"Lucca is a splendid city!—but it is not Milan," he added, with a sigh. "To be chief there, where I was only a subject, to command where I was used to obey, to be powerful there among friends who rejoice in one's greatness, to be helped by them—yes, and also to be in the midst of your enemies, and see them gnash their teeth, and to triumph in their humiliation—that is life! Here are smiling hills blooming with vines and olives, splendid knights, gay ladies, riches, polite manners; but these have no charm for Marco's heart!"

A page approached the door, and, on obtaining leave, came forward with a very low bow, and gave Marco a packet of letters, saying:

"Despatches from Lombardy. The courier is below. He says he is a retainer of yours, and is called Pelagrua."

"Let him wait," replied Marco.

He then approached a lamp, and looked over the superscriptions of the letters, throwing them down one by one on a table, as he recognized from whom they came. At last he came upon one, the sight of which caused him to start with surprise, ring a silver bell, and ask the page, who appeared instantly:

"These were not all brought by one messenger?"

"All by your retainer, except one, which was left at the palace by a courier, who immediately pursued his journey to Rome."

"Very well," said Marco, and the boy went away.

Then Visconti, throwing on the table the last letter, which he had retained till then, said to himself with a bitter sneer: "My magnificent nephew! Is not this a piece of condescension?" and then taking up one of the letters he had first glanced over, he opened it, and began to read. It was from Lodrisio, his counselor. Since the day when Marco had left Milan, this man had constantly been keeping him informed of everything that happened. Every week a courier was on the road with his letters and Marco's replies, written in cipher.

As soon as it became known that the Emperor was turning toward Lombardy, Lodrisio entreated Marco to follow him with the rebel Germans from Ceruglio, and fall on the rear of the Imperial army—a plan which he had already himself conceived—while Lodrisio undertook to raise Milan, and to go out to meet him with the city troops, who were always ill-affected toward Azzone, and did not wish on any account to receive the famished and thievish troops of the deceitful Emperor. But at that time Marco was not his own master. The rebel soldiers of the Ceruglio were not yet so entirely won over that he could feel safe in leading them to fight against the person of their natural sovereign; and, on the other hand, he had already some idea of the affair at Lucca, which, at that time, he looked upon only as a means of procuring a large sum of money, to spend in making the Germans more docile and obedient.

But unexpected chances had arisen, which no one could foresee, because they were not brought about by human counsel, which had destroyed in Milan all the machinery of the conspiracy.

The enthusiastic affection which the populace had felt for Marco was by degrees diminishing, now that he was no longer dividing among them his largess, and that he was not seen riding about Milan as before.

The chief among the Lombard cities who favored him secretly were also discouraged by seeing things going so badly without his taking any decided part.

He still received great assistance from the ecclesiastics sent by Pope Giovanni to support his cause; but at the same time, when they saw that their ally did not stir from Ceruglio, and that the Bavarian was advancing by forced marches toward Lombardy, they felt the necessity of making friends with the other side, if they did not intend the cause of the Church to be ruined in those parts, and themselves to fall into the hands of Azzone.

The ecclesiastics found it very easy to attach themselves to the new cause; for if the future was dark for them, it was not much clearer for Azzone. He had heard that the Emperor was advancing toward Lombardy with an undisciplined and mutinous army, in a state of supreme indignation with him. So the new lord of Milan trembled, as did also his uncles, before that angry, avaricious, faithless man, who had betrayed all the Ghibellines of Italy, and had caused the Visconti to pine for many months in the prisons of Monza.

In such a state of affairs a reconciliation was easy enough. In fact, Azzone made the first overtures toward the clergy, let fall a few words of submission, and they received him with open arms. His first step was to declare positively against the Bavarian, and to do his best to wrest the territory from him. In this way the new lord of Milan found his safety in the very means that had been prepared for his ruin.

Marco had been kept informed of these events from the beginning. Lodrisio's letter told him how Milan was fortifying herself in all possible haste and excitement to resist the Emperor; how Monza, Lodi, and many other cities and fortresses, had sent word that they would suffer themselves to be destroyed to their foundations rather than open their gates; and that, as to their own intrigues, this was not the time to go on with them, for now all parties had assembled round Azzone to resist the common enemy.

Lodrisio begged of him to be of good heart, for their plots were not discovered, and the reconciliation between the clergy and the Viceroy was far from being perfect or sincere.

When he had finished reading, Marco threw the paper on the table, saying: "What a future of deceit and hypocrisy! It is a hard school to have been brought up in! I was not born for this vile age! Yet"— but without finishing his broken sentences, he opened and read Azzone's letter. The Viceroy informed him also at length of the late events, explained the causes that had obliged him to declare against the Bavarian, begged him to employ the German soldiers from Ceruglio, so that they should not reënforce his enemy; and to forward, by his good offices, the proposals of alliance and protection made to various communes of Tuscany and Romagna; lastly, he asked him for advice as to the manner of fortifying Milan.

The other letters from various Lombard nobles were much to the same effect.

"They think I am going down in the world," he said in his heart; "but when they hear that I am Lord of Lucca, and that these Lombard affairs are settled, they will again cluster round me."

Then he sent for Pelagrua, who could hardly recover from his astonishment at finding his master the prince of such a powerful city, when he expected only to find him at the head of some revolted troops in a castle in Val de Nievole. Entering the hall, he made a very low bow, and tried to express his pleasure; but Visconti cut him short by asking:

"Did you see Lodrisio before setting off?"

"Yes, he gave me the letters I brought you."

"And on what terms is he with the Viceroy?"

"On exactly those he wishes to be; he is in high favor. He is entrusted with the fortifications of the bridge of Archetto, on the most important side of the city."

"Then the Milanese have decided to put a good face on it?"

"Yes, and to show their teeth also, and good sharp ones they are."

"Tell me how they are off for arms."

"They have emptied all the armorers' shops; day and night they are making pikes and lances; there will soon be in use six mangonels, eight big swivel-guns, and I do not know how many *stondegarde*. They are fortifying the bastions, and are placing their big, new, wooden towers; each gate displays its own banner; and when the big bell of the Signoria is heard, every one is to hasten to his ward, so that, in less than an hour, forty thousand fighting-men can be on the walls."

"Now attend," said Marco to his seneschal: "I wish you to tell Lodrisio—I have written also to him, but tell him none the less—that he must take care to strengthen the bastions of the Ticinese Gate, where the mills are close to the Tesinello, so that the city may not want for bread; that he must dam up and turn the water so as to make it pass under the bridge of San Eustorgio; and you are to take care that my castle of Rosate be prepared to sustain a siege."

"Then," replied Pelagrua, hesitating, "do you mean to declare yourself openly? Lodrisio advised me to speak to you"—

"I have not asked Lodrisio's advice, and still less yours," said Marco, sternly. "I am sending orders to my estates of Martesan and Castel Seprio to furnish Rosate with men and provisions."

The seneschal had not reached the door, when Marco called him back, saying:

"And what news can you give me of Ottorino?"

"He has never been seen in Milan since the day you encountered him in the lists. I know, however, on good authority, that he had himself carried to his fortress of Castelletto, where he spent fifteen or twenty days in recovering; and now there is a report that he has gone to meet the Bavarian, to enter his service."

"That is not true!" said Marco, decidedly.

"And yet I know," answered Pelagrua, submissively, "that other Milanese have joined the Emperor's troops."

"As many as you like, but not Ottorino."

The steward did not answer a word. Marco, after a moment, asked him more calmly:

"And Count del Balzo, is he still at Milan?"

"He is at Milan; he was very anxious to go away to Limonta as soon as the first rumor arrived of the approach of the Bavarian, and the risk of a siege; but a proclamation forbade anyone to leave the city."

"And then, Ottorino," continued Marco, "has he not been seen at the Balzo palace?"

"Since the day of the jousting you may feel assured that he has not set foot inside it. Nothing stirs in that house without my hearing about it an hour later. If, however, you wish to make sure, and settle matters—you can trust to me—I know how things are managed. And Lodrisio also charged me to tell you that your rupture with Ottorino cannot fail to bring suspicion on him—that, in short, the young man knows too much—it's rather risky, and it might be better to silence him."

Visconti, who perceived to what point these insinuations were leading, answered:

"Tell Lodrisio that he may set his mind at rest; that I know Ottorino well, and will become security for his fidelity at all times and in all vicissitudes of fortune."

"Oh, I never intended—I only said—I will never touch a hair of his head."

"No, beware of it," replied Marco, and was silent for a moment. Then he burst out suddenly with this question:

"And what was said in Milan of the unknown knight that unhorsed Ottorino?"

"Some declared it was Rusconi's son, others that he was a knight of King Robert's; but the wounded boy, as soon as he came to his senses, told some of his friends that there was no one in Italy but you who could strike such a blow as that."

"But he has not been permanently injured? he is really recovered, is he not?" asked Visconti, eagerly.

"There is not even a scar to be seen. He is as active and blooming as ever, so that the Count's daughter will have nothing to complain of."

"And what news of her?" interrupted Marco.

"Of whom?"

"Of Bea— she of whom you were speaking—the Count's daughter."

"All I know is, that after the joust, for four or five days she was dangerously near the point of death; then her fever returned, and her parents went nearly mad over her, and never left her side, or ceased to nurse her and pet her, till at last they got her round by degrees. She still is, however, in a fractious state—her head stuffed full of spoiled child's fancies; but they are of no importance."

"Take care whom you are speaking of, you insolent hound, or by the Holy Rood, I will give you something to remember it by, of which you will bear the marks as long as you live."

To say this, to point to the door with one hand, and then to put him out, was the work of an instant.

Marco, when he was alone, sat down at the table and wrote five or six letters, and then again summoned his seneschal to whom he entrusted them, giving him various instructions as to the manner of remitting them.

"As for Ottorino, I am determined that he shall not show himself in Milan, and that if he ever does come there, Count del Balzo must not receive him into his house; in any case, you had better keep your eye on him, as you have done, and if anything new happens, tell me at once."

"I will certainly," replied Pelagrua; "but suppose I discovered—it is said already the young lady is betrothed to him, and a wedding is soon arranged; even the father"—

"You must prevent it," said Marco.

"But how? because if"—

"In any case," repeated Marco, "you must prevent it."

"I understand what you mean; I see it all," said the knave to himself; he went down quickly to the courtyard, mounted his horse, and cracking his whip, soon left the palace behind him, on his way to Lombardy.

CHAPTER XX

REËNFORCEMENTS FOR MILAN

MARCO VISCONTI forgot himself and his cares at last in a restless and disturbed slumber. In the mean time, three soldiers had been chosen out of the bodyguard, whose post was the corridor of the palace, the watch in the anteroom of the new prince: two Germans and one Lucchese. Of the Germans, one was from the band that had come from Ceruglio with Marco, and the other was a veteran from the city garrison, who had served under Castruccio. He from Ceruglio had evidently paid more attention to the vintners than to the oil merchants of the district, and, fatigued by having spent the day in harrying the villages on the plain of Lucca, had seated himself on one of the low walls that followed the embrasure of the windows about half the height of the parapet from the ground, and having placed his morion in the niche opposite to him, slept away soundly, holding, between his legs stretched out before him, with the feet crossed, the butt end of his lance, the point of which rested upon the angle of the slope of the window.

The other German stood stiffly upright in front of the door leading into the room occupied by Marco; and the Italian walked up and down the apartment with long strides. At last he stopped between the fellow-soldier on guard and the one that was asleep; turned on the former a glance half bitter and half sad, and pointing to the latter, said:

"Do you hear, German, how your countryman's snoring? This morning he has been behaving himself like a wolf, and now he is like a pig. What rascals they are to plunder that village! Poor Campomaggiore! I have never been able all day to get out of my nose the stench of that burning. Go on, snore on, you ugly rogue, and rest after your fine doings! To call them rebels! My God! as if they were! I should like to send that beast of a countryman of yours into his last sleep."

"I am German as well," answered the other, "but I have fought so many years under Castruccio that I think I ought not to be looked upon as a foreigner in Lucca; so, Fazio, you had better call me comrade."

"Well, then, if you please, comrade, what do you think of this fine expedition to Campomaggiore, and do you think my Lord Marco ought to have allowed it?"

Just then, the morion, which the German soldier from Ceruglio had carelessly placed on the parapet of the window too near the edge, being shaken in some way, happened to slip down, and rolled to the sleeper's feet, who was disturbed by the noise, and hearing the others mention Marco, he joined in their conversation in order to appear awake, and said, in his hoarse, gruff voice:

"What are you saying of Marco?"

"We are saying," replied Fazio, angrily, "that what you did at Campomaggiore was scoundrel's work, and that Marco ought to have strangled you all, before giving you leave"—

"Giving us leave!" interrupted the German—"I like that! We depend on him, do we? It is like the hand having to ask leave of the glove to hit a blow with its fist!"

"You are set up indeed," returned the Italian. "Any one would think you were the captain and Visconti a soldier's boy, a"—

"Who says Marco Visconti is a low fellow?" said the other. "He is a soldier such as there are few left, and now that Castracani is dead, I hold him to be the first leader in Italy; but that has nothing to do with a man wanting his leave before setting to work to secure his booty."

"It has this to do with it," broke in the other German—"that the captain of a troop has the command of his men, and soldiers that do not wish to be taken for marauders must remain under discipline."

"Well, our discipline is arranged in this way," replied the first man; "As soon as we get our pay, and the bit over promised us for coming down here, then we are the masters, and Marco is Lord of Lucca only because he is our chief."

"Then, if Marco is your chief, don't you depend on him?"

"How dull you are! He is our leader, and he is not our leader; we have elected him for a very good reason, to give in to popular prejudices, because if a troop go about with a leader, and without deafening everybody's ears with loud trumpets and drums, they are called marauders; but if the marauders are in correct ranks, with somebody in front with a gold chain round his neck and a rolling-pin in his hand—if one of them bears a dish-clout fastened on the top of a spear, and there is a great row with trumpets and fifes, then they are warriors, and people are respectful to them, and throw their doors wide open to them."

"But what interest can Visconti have in agreeing to this bargain?" asked Fazio.

"What interest? Why, of course, the interest that moves the whole world. Those pretty yellow things which make white appear black, and black white, which stir the old man and steady the young one, which"—

"Have done with all this balderdash," struck in the Italian. "Marco Visconti influenced by money! so generous and liberal as he is!"

"Yes, certainly; even worthy men are often found searching in the mud for pence!" replied the Ceruglio soldier. "I have seen them often enough obliged to shovel up the coins out of the ditch, no matter how, so long as they could get hold of them. Not that I would accuse Marco of stooping so low as that, though he wants money all the more, just because he is so generous and open-handed. And then sometimes occasions do arise when great leaders are obliged to fling their gold away without stint. For instance, supposing there is a fair lady in the case, who entirely occupies their thoughts to the neglect of their warlike concerns; and then, all of a sudden, an immediate onslaught has to be made on a neighbor's property, the leaders must make it worth their soldiers' while, more especially if the owner of the property does not seem inclined to part with it."

The Italian felt his temper rise, but he took a turn about the room before saying:

"Which glasses hold most, I wonder, those belonging to the landlord of 'Canovetta,' or those of his rival at 'La Gattajuola?' for to judge by your language, you must have given both a fair trial."

"Look you," replied the German; "I do not know anything that touches my heart nearer than my purse; notwithstanding, though I am not easily caught myself, I always find out the poor simple fellows that have got a lady on the brain; and if you had seen my Lord Marco at Ceruglio, when there was nothing to do—for whenever he had to do anything practical, or set his head to work, it was quite another thing; but if you had seen him then, you would have taken him for some blockhead who had left his senses at home. Well, evidently the bird was limed—and then I could tell you besides"—

The Italian cut him short by saying:

"I hear the clash of arms outside, it must be the standard-bearer, Virlimbacca, who got as drunk as an owl this evening;" and ran off to station himself in front of the entrance at the other end of the hall.

We will wish them good-night, and return to Milan.

All the villages of the district immediately subject to the Visconti, or over which they preserved the suzerainty, were held, at the pleasure of their liege lords, by tenor of investiture, such as payments of money, labor, beasts, or men-at-arms. But these obligations were carried out according to the state of the times, or the power and inclinations of the lord and subject respectively; so that nothing was more common than to see a baron, count, or abbot shut himself up in his castle, and defy all comers; or for a borough or village to raise its drawbridge, and receive, with cross-bow shots, those who were sent to collect taxes.

Azzone, at the beginning of his reign, never was able to scrape money enough together to pay the Emperor the sum promised upon his investiture; but no sooner had he made his peace with the Church than he got any sum he chose to ask for.

Limonta was a fief of the monastery of San Ambrogio. The abbot, who was one of the Emperor's creatures, did not care to call out his own vassals against him: and, in fact, he had already issued a proclamation to this effect:

"No person, under pain of felony and excommunication, shall dare to favor in any way the party of Azzone, a rebel against his liege lord, as well as against the Supreme Pontiff Nicholas V, and an abettor of that schismatic, heretic, homicide and necromancer, that monster of wickedness and iniquity, Pietro Jacopo di Caorsa, who had the audacity to call himself Pope Giovanni XXII."

The people of Limonta were a little frightened at first at this braggadocio, but when they saw it was likely to bring the reverend prelate into disrepute with the authorities in Milan and the surrounding districts, they made game of it. It was no slight relief for those poor people to be out of the clutches of a wretched little potentate, who had bullied them so long. So when the priests, sent by the Pope, came to get the Limontese to take up arms against the Emperor, no one can describe the wild pranks with which they were welcomed by the mountaineers.

All the inhabitants now wished to remove themselves and their poor furniture into Milan, and it was not easy to turn them from this piece of folly, which would have emptied the village, and, by pouring in a helpless crowd, have added considerably to the embarrassments of a city that was daily expecting a siege. A selection was therefore made of all who were capable of bearing arms, and our friend the priest was placed at their head.

On arriving at Milan they found the people engaged in making redoubts and ditches, building fortifications, and fabricating engines of war. The streets swarmed with artificers, men-at-arms, priests and friars of all denominations, brown, white, and black. On the squares and at the angles of the streets were forges of the armorers. Mingled with the clang of hammers, the rasping of files, and the shouts and songs of the artisans and spectators, was to be heard in all directions the noise of drums and trumpets, and of the bells which never ceased pealing day or night from every church.

The citizens received the new arrivals with demonstrations of welcome and fraternity. The Limontese were at once recognized by their banner, and were conducted to Count del Balzo's house, where they were to be lodged.

The house of Count del Balzo, being close to the postern gate of Algiso, now Ponte Beatrice, was chosen for the quarter of the troops who were to defend that postern, the terrace beneath, and the moat, which reached as far as Il Pontaccio, in those days called La Porta Comacina.

The Limontese took possession of a hall on the ground-floor, and while they were seating themselves, a groom came in to summon the priest into the Count's presence.

This good man, at the Count's request, told him the names of all his people whom he had brought.

"Since I have been brought into such a scrape," said the Count, "it is a great comfort to find round me at least a few people whom I know well, and to have some good faithful vassals at hand to take my part."

The priest sought to give him courage, assuring him the Emperor would be repulsed, and that great preparations were being made for the defense; but the Count only became impatient.

"And what do you know about it?" he answered, brusquely; "You know nothing. Now, what I want you to do is to impress upon the Limonta people that they must never forsake me, for I may fairly call myself a Limontese. By-the-bye, I want you to find out for me among the people from the monastery of San Ambrogio, those soldiers who set fire to the district, for I don't want any quarrels between them and our people. If only Lupo was here—soldiers understand one another so soon; he might keep the peace. The mischief is, I don't know where he is now."

"Lupo?" said the vicar; "we saw him just outside the gates, in a little square, teaching a company of peasants the sword exercise. He came with us as far as your door, but would not enter; for he said you had forbidden him to do so."

"It is true," answered the Count, embarrassed; "there was a certain story; but now, if he would come, I would gladly give him leave."

"In that case," replied the priest, "you can send for him immediately."

The Count sent off at once, and soon after Lupo appeared. When he heard what was required of him:

"It all depends," he said, "on whether our mountaineers are willing to be reconciled after all they have suffered; as to the soldiers, I can answer for them."

The priest went to the lower hall to prepare his flock for the reconciliation: and he was still speaking to them when Lupo entered, holding Vinciguerra by the arm; and behind them came all the other soldiers who would have so cruelly ill-used the Limontese, had not Lupo arrived opportunely to their rescue.

The soldiers were the first to cry out, "Viva Milano!" "Viva Limonta!" and the mountaineers rose and went to meet them, and the persecutors and persecuted embracing each other forgot all the sufferings they had endured and the revenge they had taken.

The boatman was the only person that remained seated, with his arms tightly folded, and an expression that showed no emotion.

Vinciguerra recognized him as the peasant that had conducted Bellebuono to the ambush, and tapping him on his shoulder, said:

"What! my good fellow, are you here, too?"

Michael, without answering a word, looked at him with eyes as savage as those of a mastiff catching sight of a wolf.

"Ah, you rogue!" continued the soldier, "you took us all in with that nonsense about the florins which Bellebuono had gone to get, and which we were all to share in. We shall know each other another time."

"And I am here," answered Michael, "to give you satisfaction, and to all the rest of you."

"Oh!" cried the soldier, laughing, "so the crabs would bite the whales. Now, look here, my master, the past is dead and buried; what has been, has been; come here, and let us have a drink together."

"Come, we are all friends here," interposed Lupo. "So come, Michael, greet and make friends with this honest soldier."

"You know what the priest said to you," the good wife whispered into the ear of the boatman.

Michael rose, and obeyed as if yielding to force, and then went back to sit down as before.

"What an ill-conditioned fellow!" said Vinciguerra to Lupo, going off with him, "As if it were his part to forgive! I should have thought it had been the other way."

Lupo told Vinciguerra of this man's great sorrow in having lost his only son in a shipwreck, and how, ever since, he had seemed stupefied by his grief. At the same time the priest, going up to Michael, gave him an account of all that Vinciguerra had done for Lupo at the time the latter was at Chiaravalle in his charge, under sentence of death. These pieces of information, acting on their naturally good-natured dispositions, inclined them to kinder feelings, so that at last the boatman and the soldier, coming on each other directly afterward in the middle of the hall, threw their arms, without saying a word, round each other's neck; and ever after a cordial fellow-feeling existed between them.

CHAPTER XXI

INGENUITY AND VALOR

THE Count arranged that the priest of Limonta should have a private room set apart for him, and that he should be a guest at his own table; and he also received into his own family the boatman's wife, our old friend Marta, who was lodged in the part of the house occupied by Ambrose, where she looked after the household affairs in company with four or five other women.

The good old creature became very intimate with the falconer's family; Marianna, Ambrose, Lupo and Lauretta were all very fond of her.

With Bernardo alone she never could get on: that tiresome fellow had never given up any of his obstinate predilections in favor of the Bavarian and the anti-Pope.

News arrived that the Bavarian's army was advancing. There were two, three, or four thousand troopers, and an infinite number of foot soldiers. Cane della Scala contributed four hundred knights; many Ghibelline nobles from Lombard cities, and many from the most powerful families in Milan itself, had raised the imperial standard, and hastened with their vassals to the Emperor's assistance. His forces were enormous; the preparations for the siege were terrible.

At this time Pelagrua arrived from Lucca, and, having conferred privately with Lodrisio, hurried off to fortify and victual the castle of Rosate. Soon afterward another courier arrived with letters for the Viceroy, and spread the news that Marco was master of Lucca and the surrounding territory. The joy this created in Milan is easier to be imagined than described.

A day passed, another and another, and then arrived news that the Bavarian had arrived before Monza, and that her gates were shut in his face. But it was not till the twenty-first of May that the imperial standard came in sight, followed by an extraordinary number of men and horses, and a marvelous baggage train.

The Emperor at first pitched his camp on the bridge of Archetto, and then advanced toward the postern of San Ambrogio, and he and his court took up their residence in the monastery of San Vittore, which was outside the city walls, and just opposite the postern.

The principal efforts of the Emperor in the siege were directed against the suburb of Porta Ticinese, in the hope that, by making himself master of the hills at that place, he might starve the city into surrender; but that portion, by the advice of Marco, had been fortified more strongly than any other.

The siege had lasted more than a month, when Lupo was informed by some of the leaders that at the postern gate of Algiso, that very night, some provisions of which the city began to stand in need were to be expected; and he was charged to let down the drawbridge as soon as he heard the signal agreed upon. Lupo had been appointed captain of the Limonta troop, and placed in charge of this postern.

The night came; our mountaineers were scattered along the ramparts looking toward Porta Comacina, with Lupo on the tower beside the postern, looking out. After waiting a long time he saw a light on the steeple of the Convent of San Simpliciano: this was the signal, to which he hastened to respond by opening a dark lantern, and placing it for an instant between two battlements on the tower. He then went to a lower floor where his father, Ambrose, slept, together with Michael the boatman, and four other Limontese, and said: "Get up immediately, so as to be in time." They rose immediately, and ran to the loopholes, but heard only the steps of two sentinels at the foot of the tower. In a short time their ears caught a dull sound, the rumbling of wheels, the trampling of horses.

"Listen!" said Lupo; "I believe it is a wagon."

"It is undoubtedly a wagon," said Ambrose.

"What blockheads those peasants must be!" continued Lupo. "What need was there to come with a wagon, and make so much noise? Could they not bring the things on their shoulders—or at the worst employ mules?"

The night was dark. A man advanced to the edge of the trench, clapped his hands three times, and said, "San Ambrogio."

"For whom?" inquired Lupo.

"For Luchino and for the Fatherland."

"Why do you come with a wagon, at the risk of being caught by the German patrols?"

"It is provender for the Count's stables," answered the man from below.

The drawbridge was now lowered, and four horses drawing a wagon of hay came on under the arch, till the leaders almost touched the closed portcullis with their heads; at a word from the Limontese captain the portcullis rose, and lifting itself noisily between the fluting of the pillars, was nearly hidden in the vault above. The man that had charge of the wagon urged on the horses a few steps, and then stopped short with some trivial excuse. "Go on!" shouted Lupo to him; but instead of obeying he uttered a shrill whistle, and a band of soldiers, issuing from behind the church of San Marco, where they had been hiding, galloped toward the arch.

"Let down the gate!" cried Lupo. They raised the weights, and the portcullis fell, but in falling it came on the wagon and remained suspended in the air. "Raise the bridge!"

"We can't raise it, for those outside are holding it with ropes and pulleys."

"Treason! treason! Ambrose! Michael! Limontese to the rescue! Treason!"

The keeper of the tower blew a sharp blast on his horn to summon help; those scattered along the fortifications ran up from all sides: the two sentinels, the falconer, the boatman, four or five others, rushed on either side of the wagon, and laying wildly about them, succeeded in keeping back some men on foot who were forcing an entrance. At the same time Lupo sprang on the backs of the horses fastened to the wagon, showered blows upon them with the butt-end of a lance, pricked them with the point, and urged and frightened them with his voice; so at last, by arching their backbones, and straining every nerve, with their bellies bent to the ground, they succeeded in moving their load a little, notwithstanding the resistance that was opposed by the enormous bars of iron sunk in the hay, which had yielded to the weight. The falconer's son shouted out two or three times for the gate to be raised for a moment, so as to set the wagon free to pass below; but in the midst of the confusion and uproar his voice was not heard. In the mean time the German cavalry horses had become furious, the bridge reëchoed with their iron hoofs, and some of them had already penetrated under the arch, where it was perfectly dark, and where the confusion, and noise, and the exchange of blows was frightful, till in the midst of the clamor was heard the sound of descending iron, and then arose a sharp cry of agony. A last effort had at that moment freed the wagon from the weight that embarrassed it, and the portcullis in its descent had fallen on a German trooper.

Soon some lighted torches arrived. Five or six German horsemen, who had made their way through, were quickly despatched by the Limontese, and below the arch of the bridge began a furious fight between those outside, who were trying with levers to raise the portcullis, and those within, who were using every effort to prevent them. They dealt savage blows right and left with their pikes and lances, to the destruction alike of men and horses; but the Germans had the worst of it, embarrassed as they were by the formidable defenses with which the gate on their side was armed; sharp spikes, on which, in their headlong career, they were impaled.

Lupo now perceived a fresh troop of enemies advancing on the road of San Marco, so he ordered some of his people, who were arriving from all sides, to mount on the tower and level a mangonel at them. In a few minutes a storm of stones descended, and from the loopholes a cloud of arrows, and the Germans found they had better take to flight.

The drawbridge having been raised without further hindrance, and all being now quiet, the Limontese returned to let the portcullis completely down, and found beneath it a fine Hungarian horse, that had been caught, together with its rider. The horse, which had received that enormous weight on its spine, had both its hind legs broken; the soldier was held by the foot, and both were struggling violently to get from under the terrific weight.

Our mountaineers took pity on the trooper, and removing him from the trap, carried him to a house, where he was looked after by old Marta, who was experienced in setting broken bones.

That same night, Pelagrua, wrapped in a gray cloak, with a hood over his eyes, and fully armed under his mantle, appeared at the house of Lodrisio Visconti, whose door he found half closed. He went in, and, recognized by some soldiers who were standing on guard there, passed on into a room where the master of the house came to meet him.

"Are you alone? and at this late hour?" said Lodrisio. "What has happened?"

"Death and confusion to all those meddling hill-folk!" replied Pelagrua, throwing off his cloak.

"What! Has the stratagem failed?"

"Everything is as bad as it can be."

"Oh, you cowardly traitor!" cried the knight, going up to him, clenching his fist in his face. "I don't know what restrains me from leaving the marks of my hands on that ugly visage of yours."

"Listen!" said Pelagrua, "It was all owing to that gallows-bird of a Lupo, that squire of Ottorino's. He did not give me time to unfasten the horses, and I had some difficulty in escaping from their claws and in coming here to tell you about it."

"And you may have been recognized?"

"No; for I had my hood over my eyes, and then there was no one to see us."

"And the Germans?"

"Were all driven back."

"By a handful of peasants taken unawares?"

Here the seneschal of Rosate began to describe exactly and minutely the whole affair.

"The rascals!" exclaimed Lodrisio, "the knaves! But it is I who am a fool, for having trusted such an affair to a coward like you; and I must pay for it. Still, at any rate, you have lost your chance of fortune."

"As for that matter, I might have run the chance of breaking my neck on my own account. But what does it signify? I knew well enough that it was a case of 'nothing venture, nothing have,'" answered the ruffian, coolly, "and therefore I spared no trouble, and nothing was left undone by me, as I told you."

Lodrisio struck his brow with one hand, and repeated;

"To make such a dead failure as this—to be stopped in full career by such a small obstacle!"

"There is one comfort," continued Pelagrua, "which is, that no one suspects us. The affair was conducted so cunningly, by such secret means, that—I don't say this because I had a hand in it—but I defy the devil himself to find the key to the mystery. I have run the risk all myself, and you"—

"That remains to be seen, wretched dolt!" cried Lodrisio. "Now, get out of my sight! To-morrow evening you had better go off to your castle of Rosate, which I wish to goodness you had never left!"

As this attempt had failed, a chance for the Emperor no longer remained. His German troops, discouraged and harassed by the frequent sallies from the town, could hardly be kept together; the Italians (as the confederates called themselves), destitute alike of pay and provisions, betrayed, and ill-used, were abandoning the camp in small bodies; and it could easily be seen that the Bavarian would soon be forced to raise the siege, and return home by the shortest road.

When Pelagrua, together with the news of the principality of Lucca having been bestowed on his master, had brought to Lodrisio the other no less wonderful intelligence of Marco's love for the daughter of Count del Balzo, Lodrisio had perceived that this love might be used as a means to keep Visconti's interest in affairs at Milan still alive.

That a caprice for a woman (thus he qualified Marco's love for Beatrice) could have so great a power over his friend's heart as to lead him to imperil such a position as that which he now held, was not a thought that could enter for a moment into a mind like Lodrisio's. But that fancy, he said to himself, could be kept up, and excite in his heart the thought of another principality, rather better worth having than that of Lucca.

CHAPTER XXII

A MARRIAGE

PELAGRUA reappeared on the evening of the next day, and confirmed Lodrisio in what he had already heard from many quarters, that nothing had transpired of his transactions with the Emperor, who was now striking his tents and making his way toward Germany.

"Important things have occurred," said the seneschal of Rosate. "I have seen the Count's groom, who, as you know, is at my beck and call, and he tells me that for some time great doings have been going on at home."

"What sort of doings?"

"Why, marriage doings."

"And do you mean to say the Count agrees? What has become of all his fears of Marco?"

"Agree! no, he has not agreed, for his fright has not yet gone off; but what does that signify, such a blockhead as he is? The girl is going mad from her suffering; the mother is her adviser, and it will not be long before"—

"Well, then, we must look alive," interrupted Lodrisio, "and put a stop to this marriage at any price; for, although Marco may have fallen a victim to a pair of bright eyes, as soon as he knows that the lady is not for him, he will no doubt fly into one of his frenzies, as he has done before, but what of that? He must make up his mind to give her up, and he will give her up."

"I firmly believe," replied the steward of Rosate, "that the girl is nearer his heart than you think, and it may well be that he, when he knows she is another's, will get quite mad and savage; but I know one thing, that he will begin by falling on me because I have not prevented the marriage. And, worse than that, I have heard a rumor that after the marriage the wedded pair are to set off nobody knows where, and then how shall we look, all of us, when the lady has disappeared before our eyes?"

"Then we must use every exertion to stop the marriage," said Lodrisio.

"That's soon said," replied the other; "when he was dismissing me at Lucca, he dinned the same thing into my ears, but he would not hear of Ottorino being harmed in any way."

"As for him, we must wait for what will turn up, and in any case, you must act according to my orders."

"I am most willing, but, you see"—

"Let us have no buts; you must lay aside all scruples; those who act with me must follow me blindly without questioning or turning back."

"Well, you won't find me drawing back. I only point point out the doubts and difficulties before beginning an enterprise; but never after it has been once set on foot."

"Yes, I have already had a specimen of your talents in the last affair."

"But," said Pelagrua, "if the devil mixes himself up in a business, what can I do?"

After that night when Beatrice returned from the feast bearing Lupo's reprieve, her mother learned from her frightened confidences the dreadful certainty that she was beloved by Visconti.

Ermelinda knew too well how entirely Beatrice had lost her heart to Ottorino, so that even if Marco, which was scarcely credible, were to ask her to be his wife, it could not be expected that she would be willing to accept him. In order to protect her from any such peril, her mother thought it best to hasten the marriage with the young knight. In this way she flattered herself she would extinguish all hope in Marco's heart, and place her daughter under the protection of a husband.

As soon as Visconti was safe in Tuscany, Ermelinda began to entreat her husband's consent to the match which, at one time, he had arranged himself; but the Count was furious at the very idea, without being willing to remember that he had encouraged his daughter's attachment for the young knight, when her mother had used every effort to divert her from such a feeling. But partly influenced by his wife's persistence, partly by the continued sight of his beloved Beatrice's passionate feelings, and partly by time, he at last became more manageable. An additional shock to his determination was given by the news that Marco had become lord of Lucca; and now that he considered him quite settled in Tuscany, and unlikely to find himself able to turn his attention to Lombard affairs, he began to allow Ottorino to return to the house that had been closed against him.

As to Ottorino, the misfortunes he had suffered on Beatrice's account had deeply wounded his heart. If formerly the beloved image had mingled with all his dreams, now she alone entirely filled the void of his impassioned soul. We say, the void of his soul, because the youth, since the bitter treatment he had received from Marco, felt that everything was forever at an end between him and his former leader. His future being wrecked, nothing remained to him but Beatrice, the only desire he retained was to make her his, and then together with her to leave his native land, and betake himself to Asia to fight the Saracens.

But how could he imagine that the damsel's parents would allow her to accompany him on so long and dangerous a journey, in search of an uncertain and mysterious future? Strange to say, the apprehension they felt of Marco smoothed every difficulty. Ermelinda was persuaded by the anxiety to place her daughter in safety, As for the Count, he resigned himself to this hard sacrifice to save his skin, provided he could assure Marco that he had not broken his word, and could make him believe that Ottorino had carried off his daughter.

The wedding was to take place when things had quieted down after the siege. The Count made a condition that it was to take place secretly; the married couple were to set off at once to Castelletto, a fort on the Ticino belonging to Ottorino.

The Emperor, in despair of doing any good by prolonging the siege, had come to some agreement with Azzone, and struck his camp. By degrees the country troops, who had come to defend the city in its danger, were returning to their homes. The Limontese were also preparing to go back to their mountains.

The lances of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who, by the Viceroy's arrangement, were to remain in Milan, came to wish our friends God-speed. Lupo asked for Vinciguerra, and heard that he had fallen in a sally from the suburb of Porta Ticinese.

The same morning that these good mountaineers were to begin their journey, their priest was summoned in great secrecy to bless the nuptials of Ottorino and Beatrice. Although Azzone was reconciled to the Church, the interdict was still in effect, and was not raised till some months later; there was therefore an honorable and apparent reason why the marriage should take place by stealth, without the usual solemnities and the splendor suitable to the rank of the parties.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ABDUCTION

AS soon as the trumpet gave the signal for the departure of the Limontese, Beatrice, restraining her tears, dried her eyes, composed her countenance, and then took up her position with her parents in a gallery looking toward the street. The banner of the swan was first seen to issue from the gate, followed by the priest and his flock, two and two, all on their way to the postern gate of Algiso; the boatman and his wife brought up the rear. Marta, raising her head to salute her benefactors, was agreeably surprised to see Beatrice quite recovered, and following with her eyes the little party as it moved off.

It was arranged that the married pair should set out for Castelletto the next morning. After reiterated embraces, the girl resolutely tore herself finally from her mother's neck, and leaving her in floods of tears, flew down the staircase into the courtyard, mounted the palfrey prepared for her, and set off on her journey. Ottorino, Lupo, Lauretta, and two of the Count's grooms, who were to escort the bridal party as far as Castelletto, mounted their steeds quickly, and followed her.

Our travelers proceeded for some time in silence along the road leading to Sesto Calende. At last Ottorino laid his hand on the neck of the gentle steed ridden by his bride, and without relaxing their speed, said to her:

"Do you remember, sweetheart, the hours we passed together on the rock of Morcate? You were seated between your father and me, and one of your hands was enclosed in mine. It was then that the first hope entered my heart that I might be able to win you one day. How many trials have come upon us since then; and now you are all mine, mine forever! Oh, the ineffable sweetness of these words! You are my only blessing! I swear to devote my whole life to you, in order somewhat to brighten a lot that you have had the courage to share with me!"

They went as far as Gallarate, where they dismounted at an inn, intending to rest for some hours, when lo and behold! a courier arrived, and inquiring for Ottorino, handed him a letter. The youth opened it, and was nearly beside himself with surprise on seeing Marco's signature at the bottom. He spoke of having arrived in great haste and secrecy from Lucca, and that he wished to see him at once at Castel Seprio on matters of importance, adding, that he felt he had done him a serious injury, which he was anxious to repair.

"I must first go to Castelletto," said Ottorino to the courier; "but tell whoever sent you, that I will be at Seprio before dark."

"Oh, pray come at once," was the reply; "the warder sent me off in haste, and I have already lost much time in searching for you."

"But how did you guess that I was here?"

"I heard from a groom of Count del Balzo's that you had set off in this direction. I followed you immediately, and have not been able to catch you before."

"And who gave you the letter?"

"The seneschal of Seprio, so lately as last evening. He came there with a baron, and five or six couriers were at once sent off in different directions."

"Are you acquainted with that baron?"

"No, because I am a stranger here; but he must be of great importance, to judge by the honor paid him. He is a tall man, in middle life, and very fine looking. His face"— and he described Marco to a hair.

Ottorino made up his mind that delay, besides being discourteous, would be inexcusable at that crisis, from the serious interests depending on despatch, and resolved on a rapid visit to Seprio, and then to return at once to proceed on his way with his wife.

Castel Seprio was only about half-an-hour's journey distant; and the going and returning would not take longer than the halt they were to make at Gallarate. He therefore told the courier to wait for him, and ran gayly off to tell Beatrice.

"Is it Marco? said she, in alarm; "is it Marco who has sent for you? Oh, do not go, Ottorino! Let us escape from that man; take me to Castelletto."

"But he is changed, I tell you; you see that he wishes to excuse himself to me, and to make up for the harm he has done me."

"Oh, no! do not go! let us fly from him, I implore you! let us fly while we have time!"

"Attend to me, my darling," said Ottorino, taking her hand; "your terror and repugnance are too unreasonable. After all, what has ever passed between you and him that was not most kind and courteous? Was it not he who gave Lupo his life, at your entreaty and your father's?"

Beatrice, at being reminded of that terrible night, was seized with a shudder of terror, and putting her hand on her husband's shoulder, said:

"Ah, Ottorino, you do not know all."

"What do you mean?" he replied, in surprise. "So you, too, are aware of it. I thought—yes, it is too true, the knight that unhorsed me at the joust was Marco; but do you also know that he gave me my life out of kindness? Do you know that he purposely employed a blunt weapon in the encounter?"

She, who in her first agitation was on the point of revealing the secret of Marco's love, saw that a less important meaning had been given to her words, and collecting her thoughts, she remembered the importance of the secret and the strong recommendations of her mother, never to let it transpire to Ottorino, so as not to risk his being placed in deadly opposition to that formidable personage, so she turned her head away, and was silent.

Then the youth began to speak so forcibly and feelingly of the noble character of Marco, of the generous dignity of his spirit, and showed such confidence in him, such desire to renew their friendship, to rush into his arms, and explained to her of what importance this reconciliation might be in their common destiny, that she, after much resistance and many words, at last agreed that he should go to Seprio.

"You will soon come back, will you not?" said Beatrice at last.

"In two hours, at the latest, I shall be here again," replied Ottorino. "I only wish to see him, and arrange matters. In the mean time you shall stay with Lauretta under the charge of Lupo and your father's two grooms."

"But are you going to take no one with you?"

"It is only a short ride, I tell you; the courier who brought the letter will be with me, and that will be more than sufficient escort, as the country is quiet." So saying, he threw his arms round his bride, gave and received a kiss, and was off.

The two hours spoken of passed away, and a third followed them, and Ottorino did not come. Beatrice remained gazing from the window, and every object she saw moving in the distance from the quarter whence she expected him, seemed to her to be the white plume of his helmet; every noise she heard she took for the hoofs of his horse; at times she would pace up and down the room with her attendant, and then call Lupo to ask what he could not answer, then she would hurry to the balcony again, and then sit sadly in a corner waiting. Nothing but delay and hope deferred—another and another hour went by, and at last the fifth from the time of his departure, and still Ottorino came not.

Lauretta's brother at last said to his young mistress, "If you will give me leave, I will go to Castel Seprio, or send there one of your father's grooms."

"It would be better for you to go yourself," answered Beatrice, "and make him come without fail: by the time he returns it will be dark, and you will be an escort for him."

Lupo went out, and she followed him to the door: "Remember," she repeated—"remember not to come away without him."

Soon after this, evening came on: and still they waited; when at last they heard the noise of horses arriving. Beatrice ran to the balcony, crying out: "He is here!" and the effect of her sudden joy was such she could hardly breathe. A troop of horsemen stopped before the inn, and she heard a sound of steps coming up the staircase.

"Is that Ottorino? Is it you?" she said, hastening to meet whoever was coming. But it was not he; by the light of a lamp she recognized one of her father's grooms, who was ushering in the same man that had brought the letter, and had afterward departed with Ottorino; this person, after making a low bow to Beatrice, told her that he had just come from Seprio, where he had left her husband safe and sound; that he had not sent any message to her before, as he had been hoping every minute to rejoin her, as he had promised; that now seeing it would be impossible for him to hurry off before the next morning, he had despatched him with an escort of six men, to take her at once to Castelletto with her maid and the two grooms.

"And Lupo?" asked Beatrice,

"He keeps Lupo with him, as he came to join him, for he wishes to send him to-night on an errand for the lord of the castle."

"And what does he wish me to do?"

"Your husband begs you to be of good courage, for you will see him to-morrow morning at Castelletto without fail."

"And will Lupo also be at Castelletto in the morning?" asked Lauretta.

"Certainly," answered the courier.

"Now, if you please," said the Count's groom, "I will prepare the horses."

Beatrice agreed; and almost immediately everything was ready, and they set off. The mistress and maid, mounted on their palfreys, were placed between the two men with whom they had just been speaking; the rest of the party followed at a short distance.

The night was dark, the weather promised to be bad, and there was no living being to be seen. When they were at some distance from the town, Beatrice, hearing among the men behind her a noise of quarreling and blows, told the retainer of her father's, who was beside her, to go and settle the dispute that seemed to have arisen.

But he answered: "They are robbers who are attacking us"—and urging on his own horse to a gallop, he took the rein of his mistress's steed, and led it on, while the courier performed the same service for Lauretta's.

"But listen!" insisted Count Balzo's daughter—"only listen: it is Ricciardino's voice; oh, go and help him!" Ricciardino was the name of the other groom of her father's, who was behind with the armed men from Seprio.

"Never mind," returned the man, "there are seven of them well armed; you need not be afraid for them;" and he continued to urge on the horses as if to take her farther from the dangerous spot, and to place her in safety, saying that she was entrusted specially to him, and it was as much as his life was worth should any harm befall her.

Not long after this the noise ceased, and they journeyed on rather more quietly; Beatrice wished, however, to learn the issue of the uproar; she desired to speak to Ricciardino, and to hear from him what had happened: the other groom, who kept with her, after some resistance, turned back to inquire; but soon galloped up again with much apparent alarm, to announce that all the escort had dispersed, and that the thieves were on their track, and so saying he guided the party aside by some cross-roads leading into a wood. They wandered about all night, up and down secluded paths, over heaths, and through thickets; and at the end of their wanderings could not be more than an hour's distance from the place where they had started. The women, who had been thoroughly frightened by their first adventure, were still more so now, after being led to and fro, constantly moving about, without ever arriving anywhere; the guides, however, very humbly begged Beatrice to keep up her courage, and owned they had lost their way in the confusion, and had got entangled in the wood; they therefore hoped she would forgive them, and not blame them to her husband, as they had now recovered the road and would soon be at Castelletto.

Oh, if the poor creatures had known where they had strayed, and into whose hands they had fallen! Instead of going to Castelletto, they were being conducted to Marco Visconti's castle of Rosate, into the very clutches of Pelagrua; the Count's groom, who was with Beatrice, was none other than the traitor who had sold himself some time ago to this very Pelagrua, and the courier was a bravo of Lodrisio's, as also were the six men that had come from Seprio. All the events of the previous day and that night had been pre-arranged by the two scoundrels, in order to carry off Beatrice from her husband. Their object was to keep her at Marco's disposal —but they wished to do this without causing her too much alarm, and without her perceiving that she was in the power of others from the beginning, and they meant to prepare her gradually for her destiny.

They had given up their first idea of mastering, by main force, Ottorino and his two followers who had remained faithful to him, and after considering several plans, they had settled upon the one we have seen put into effect, of separating the young man from his bride by the trick of a forged letter from Marco. As to Lupo, they had arranged to send him a false message from his master, later in the night; but this was unnecessary, as we have seen, for he had fallen into the trap at Castel Seprio, as his chief had done before him; and thus the stratagem had been completed. There remained the other retainer of the Count's, who had nothing to do with this villainy, but what could one unsuspecting man do among so many? And it would be easy enough also to get rid of him.

For Pelagrua, the affair appeared at first rather too full of risk; to carry off a noble young lady and imprison her! But Lodrisio, to whom success was of the utmost importance, as well as his schemes of revenge against Ottorino, had managed to silence all his scruples, by proving to him that, in the present state of affairs, there was no other means of obtaining what his chief had expressly ordered; that necessity must excuse violent action, and the result would justify the means.

In the end they agreed that they had better leave Marco for some time in the dark as to the abduction, and see how things would turn out; but as the whole affair could not in the end be concealed from him, they must let him into the secret by degrees.

CHAPTER XXIV

UNCONSCIOUS PRISONERS

BEATRICE and her attendant arrived at the Castle of Rosate at early dawn; they entered it in the full belief that they were at Castelletto, as they knew nothing of the localities. They crossed a wide courtyard surrounded by covered galleries, ascended some stairs, and passed through various corridors, till they finally reached a saloon that opened on a further suite of rooms, without meeting a living soul. The treacherous groom who had escorted them to this point, now left them, saying he must inform the seneschal of their arrival.

The mistress and her maid, thus left to themselves, walked through the rooms, which they thought were very splendid.

Beatrice, who thought she was in her own house, fatigued with her long ride, threw herself down in an armchair, while her maid busied herself about her.

"The dawn is breaking," said Beatrice, "and he must soon arrive now."

"Oh, hardly," replied Lauretta; "we are only just arrived ourselves."

"But you must remember all the time they made us lose on the road."

"That is true. Oh, my lady, as soon as your husband comes you must tell him about those wretches; how they did not know where they were taking us, and made us lose our way, and tormented us four hours and more, and kept you on horseback all that time!"

"Four hours, is it possible? do you mean we have lost four hours?"

"Indeed we have, and more; from what my brother told me, we ought to have been only two hours coming from Gallarate, and you must remember how long we were riding, and going fast the whole time."

"Well, at any rate," replied Beatrice, " in four hours Ottorino must certainly be able to get away. Tell me, how far is it from here to Seprio?"

"I do not know at all. You know I am not acquainted with this part of the country."

"How cautious you are! Do you think it can be eight miles? Do say something—does that seem to you too short a distance? Well, let us say ten, even twelve; I will say as much as I can—twelve, shall I say?"

"Yes, it must be nearly as much as that."

"Well, that is not much for a man on horseback! It is soon done; and he may arrive any moment, so I may expect him now; don't you expect him also directly? Tell me, for pity's sake."

"He may of course come very soon, but—if he delays, you must not make too much of it; for, you know, when men are talking of their business they cannot be so particular as to an hour or two, more or less."

"Now you are speaking so that I can understand you; and you don't think that because of one or two hours' delay I should begin to be alarmed? I know how many circumstances may occur, and, as I say, I shan't be frightened—but he may, notwithstanding, arrive directly, and therefore I expect him. I implored him to make haste! But listen, don't you hear a footstep? perhaps he has come without our hearing the noise of the horses passing the drawbridge?"

So saying, she sprang up to fly to the window, but Lauretta, who was nearer it, reached it before her. The window looked on a gallery with crossed arches divided by slender pillars; thence she saw the new arrival, and recognized him before her mistress had time to look: so, drawing back her head from the iron grating, she said: "No, no! it is not they; who do you think is coming? It is Pelagrua."

"Who? the late steward of the monastery; the one that was at Limonta?"

"The very same," replied the maid, and continued, "How can he have found his way here? That man who has fled from the country and has never been heard of since. To tell you the truth, the sight of him does not please me at all; it's like a bad omen."

"You should put aside such folly. I know very well why he is here, and I might have expected to find him if I had thought about him. I will tell you about it afterward."

Beatrice remembered how when she was at Varenna with Ottorino, the day after the shipwreck, the youth, now her husband, at the request of the priest of Limonta, had undertaken to provide a refuge for the fugitive; and as she had never heard of him since, she imagined when she saw him there, that he had received some office in the castle.

There was a knock at the door of the anteroom. Lauretta, in obedience to a sign from the mistress, cried out "Come in." The door was thrown open, and Pelagrua appeared. He took off his black velvet cap, and holding it in his left hand, came forward, bowing low.

Pelagrua was fifty years of age, of middle height, and a poor, slight form; his cheeks, of a deathly pallor, never changed their hue for any cause. A thick pair of grey eyebrows shaded piercing black eyes, which but little accorded with the affected humility of his physiognomy—savage eyes, with a cruel and malicious expression—diabolical eyes, which would have condemned the face of the holiest anchorite. As he entered, he fixed them with affected humility on the ground, but from time to time he raised his head and looked around with the rapidity of lightning, as if to escape the glances of others.

He approached Beatrice, and bending one knee, he bowed to her and said: "Deign, gracious lady, to accept the homage of one of your most humble vassals, the seneschal of Castelletto."

"And has the charge of this domain been entrusted to you?"

"Yes, my lady; so I hope to be able to satisfy the illustrious and gracious lady and sovereign of my noble master, to whom I owe faith and affection for my whole life, which itself I owe to his mercy."

"You may rise," said Beatrice.

Pelagrua obeyed, and she continued, "My lord and husband chooses his own retainers; I must always be satisfied with his choice. Tell me, seneschal, do you think it will be much longer before he is here? You know he is gone to Seprio."

"I am aware of it, and I know also that those who escorted you here little deserved that honor; but do not give another thought to them, my lady, I shall know how to reward them."

"No, no," interrupted Beatrice, "I do not wish them to be punished on my account; indeed, I forbid it; all that they did, they did from good motives to obey me and their master, and if they exceeded their instructions —enough, I wish no more to be said about it."

"Is it possible," interrupted Pelagrua with a gesture of surprise and anger, "that anyone could have been so rash? I cannot believe it. I was only speaking of their unpardonable stupidity in having lost the road, but if any wretch—whoever he may be—he shall repent it."

"Oh, as to that," exclaimed Lauretta, "I assure you that Count Balzo's daughter"— but her words were cut short by a reproving glance from her mistress.

The false seneschal, pretending to be quite struck with horror, said to Beatrice, in a voice trembling with suppressed indignation, "Permit me, gracious lady, for the honor of the castle—it would be terrible for all, for me, if your noble husband ever heard of it—permit me to learn who was so bold—and I assure you"—

"I have already told you to say no more about it," said Ottorino's wife with a resolute and dignified air. "What I asked you," she added, "was whether you knew of any reason which may still delay my husband's return?"

"If you only knew," answered Pelagrua, with a face of assumed melancholy, "how grieved I am that the first news I bring you cannot be agreeable!"

"What news have you?" asked Beatrice anxiously. "Have you heard anything fresh?"

"A courier from Seprio arrived here a few moments before you did," answered the scoundrel, "with the information that you must not expect him to-day."

"Not to-day! and what keeps him there so many hours? Did the courier see my husband before coming? did he speak to him? and what message did he send me? Go and fetch him directly! I must speak instantly to the courier. Do you understand?"

"If you will allow me I can tell you everything; because really the messenger—I can hardly bring him here—he spoke with my lord before setting off—he left him in the castle, in company with Lupo and with one of your father's grooms, who arrived there last night. They are safe and sound, all three, for that assault of brigands was really nothing, and he begs you to be of good courage, and the moment that he can despatch some affairs that keep him there, he will fly to you."

"But when did he say he would return? at the latest this evening, surely?"

"Oh, yes, I firmly believe he will be here this evening."

"But did he not say so himself for certain? Go at once and fetch the courier for me. Go! go! I am not used so often to repeat an order to a vassal."

Pelagrua bowed low, cringing before her as if asking pardon, and went off, saying to himself, "Oh, the little proud thing! Be quiet, you little fool."

Lauretta, who perceived her mistress's depression, now came near her, leaned her crossed arms on the table, and bent her head toward her. "I know it must appear very hard to you, but you must cheer up. It is not as if you were in want of anything. You have only to speak to have what you wish done."

Beatrice only exclaimed, as if following out her own thoughts, "Well, at any rate, he has Lupo with him, and my father's groom."

"That is what I tell you," continued the waiting-maid, pursuing this new train of thought. "You are quite right, he is in good company and friendly quarters, and you should not be anxious, but have a little patience. Do be at peace till this evening, when I really believe he will come—but, of course, there's a chance against it."

"There is no chance about it—it is mere folly to think of it. If he had the whole world on his shoulders, he would come all the same. He might, perhaps, go there again if he was obliged, but he would come and see me, if he had not even time to dismount from his horse. That is certain. Now we must hear what this courier says. The seneschal seems to find it very difficult to bring him—this delay even begins to annoy me. What can he be doing all this time?"

What is he doing? Oh, poor child, if you only knew! Pelagrua is spending the time in instructing a bravo of his to act Ottorino's courier.

When the two rogues had arranged everything, they came up to act their parts.

The man that was to represent the courier, was an old rogue escaped from the galleys, whom Pelagrua had unearthed from a wretched hovel close to the castle, where he supported himself by begging. As he entered the lady's presence he pretended to stumble, and came forward, reeling and staggering.

Beatrice was frightened, and jumped up; but Pelagrua came near and said in a low voice with his usual submissive air, "He is a good fellow, really—it is a pity that he drinks too much. That is the reason I was afraid to bring him before you, but you see I have obeyed you. He arrived a little excited, and ever since then he has been drinking incessantly, so that he is quite stupefied. If, however, you wish to question him, I hope he will be able to answer."

"Ask him whether he saw my husband."

Pelagrua went up to the pretended drunkard, and striking him on the shoulder: "Attend to me, Mastino. My lady asks you if you saw the knight yourself, whose message you have brought from Castel Seprio?"

"The knight," replied the wretch, stammering and stuttering, "did I see the knight? Why, it was he who gave me that bottle I told you of. Ah, what wine it was! and this stuff is not bad either—only a little rough"—

The seneschal interrupted him by asking: "What did he tell you before dismissing you?"

"He said nothing but 'Drink a bottle to my health,' and I have drunk it—and I have sent two other bottles to keep the first company, and all to his health, for he is a good knight, and is not one of your stingy ones, like some others I know of."

"Now, try to attend, Mastino; was anyone else with him?"

"Did I not tell you I was there?"

"I ask if there was anyone besides?"

"Yes; there was one other."

"And who was that?"

"Why, of course, himself."

"Himself?"

"Yes, the knight, confound you; why shouldn't he be there?"

Pelagrua, shrugging his shoulders, turned to Beatrice, as if to say: "You see that nothing can be got out of him." But the poor child, who was so terribly anxious to know something about her husband, said to the seneschal: "Do try to make him answer about the return this evening."

"I will do my best," replied the traitor; and taking his comrade by the arm, he gave him a shove, and called out, "Are you going to keep us waiting for a week?" and then asked him: "Did that noble gentleman say he was coming here this evening?"

"What! do you say it is evening?" exclaimed the rascal, bursting into a coarse, ill-conditioned laugh. He then drew back a little, pointed with an unsteady finger at Pelagrua, and then trying ineffectually to stand firm on his legs, he cried out hoarsely, "He says it is evening when it is not yet vesper time. Get out, you fool! However, bring me something to drink, as my throat burns as if the devil were inside it."

"Hold your tongue, you buffoon and tell me what I ask about to-night!"

"Yes, yes; he'll come to-night certainly."

Beatrice felt quite comforted, but only for a short time, for the seneschal came close to the wretch, and bawled into his ear:

"But did not you tell me he was coming to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, yes; to-morrow morning, certainly."

"Now, do collect your senses; is it to-night, or to-morrow morning?"

Hereupon the pretended drunkard began to sing a drunken catch, in a voice like a crow.

But Pelagrua, giving him a good cuff on the mouth, cried out: "Hold your tongue, you blackguard!"

The poor young lady, disgusted with this scene, motioned to the seneschal to take the wretch away.

"Send off a trusty man on horseback at once," she said. "He must take this letter to Castel Seprio and bring back the answer—he must be here in three hours at latest, or he will be answerable to me." The seneschal replied, with a low reverence, that she should be obeyed, and left the room pulling the rascal after him, who allowed himself to be dragged like a sack, reeling from right to left, and crying out: "Where are you taking me? We are all drunk!"

CHAPTER XXV

A PRACTICAL JOKE

"YOUR husband says he will not be able to make his arrangements for your journey to the Holy Land till the end of the month; so, my child, I promise to come to see you, with your father, once more before then. We will take leave of each other at Castelletto. Now, God bless you—in a week at the latest, we shall meet again."

Such had been the last words which Ermelinda had uttered, when she tore herself weeping from Beatrice's arms on the day of their separation. When the appointed time came, the good mother mounted on horseback at her husband's side, and escorted by two retainers they departed from Milan before dawn, and arrived by rapid stages at Castelletto.

Ambrose, the falconer, was one of the two attendants—he wished to see once again his children, Lauretta and Lupo, before they also went to the Holy Land.

On reaching a plain in front of the fort, our riders saw the towers, walls, and balconies decorated as for a wedding. Ottorino's banner was flying on the topmost pinnacles, while shields of various forms and colors, emblazoned with his arms and emblems, hung from the battlements; rich hangings stretched from turret to turret, and on the rampart were planted large branches, and even whole trees, beautifully festooned with green leaves and flowers; at intervals, were fantastic arbors, with pennons on the top. Yet the appearance of all that preparation showed that the festivities for which it was intended had been over for some time, as the leaves on the shrubs, and the festoons on the trellises, were faded and drooping.

Count Balzo, after stopping a moment to contemplate the scene, turned chuckling to his wife, and said, "See, the wedding decorations have not been taken down."

As soon as the little party were descried from the castle, two servitors were sent to meet them, clad in short jackets embroidered with blue and white, each holding a silver wand; one of whom politely asked the falconer, who was a little in front, the names of the lord and lady who were about to honor the castle with their presence.

"They are Count and Countess del Balzo," he replied. On hearing this the questioner blew his horn, when a party of armed men issued from the gate, and drew up in two rows on either side of the drawbridge, to receive the new comers. Soon afterward a chime of bells was heard from one of the towers, which was drowned in its turn by shouts of revelry from the interior of the castle. Our travelers, after passing through a long passage, found the courtyard looking like a fair. A crowd of men, women, and boys, in gala dresses, came to meet them with shouts of welcome, echoed by jugglers with dancing dogs, and a band of musicians, playing on every kind of instrument.

The falconer leaped to the ground and was coming to help his mistress to dismount, when a red-faced, pursy individual came rushing through the people to meet them. This was the seneschal, who motioned to Ambrose to stand aside, and just got up in time to fulfil his duty of holding the lady's stirrup.

"Welcome!" he exclaimed, having recovered his breath. "Welcome to the noble châtelaine from her faithful lieges!" But suddenly raising his head, and looking up into the face of the lady, he muttered something, and then continued aloud:

"The lady mother of our noble lady and mistress, I presume?"

"Exactly so," replied Ermelinda.

And the seneschal, motioning to the spectators to draw back, and let the lord and lady pass, conducted them to a magnificently-furnished room on the ground floor.

While Ermelinda, having seated herself, was greeting some damsels who came to meet her, the Count took a turn about the hall, with his hands behind his back, stopping from time to time to examine the pictures on the walls.

"Is not that a portrait of Pico?" he asked the seneschal.

"Yes; of Pico Visconti, father of my noble master," was the answer with another deep bow.

"And this one is Maffeo, is it not?"

Just then the fat man felt his coat pulled by a page, who said, "The lady is asking for you."

"Yes; that is Maffeo, my master's uncle," answered the seneschal, adding, "With your permission I must go and attend on your noble lady, who has sent for me;" and, so saying, he hurried up to Ermelinda, who asked, "And where are the bride and bridegroom? have you told them of Count Balzo's arrival?"

"The bride and bridegroom!" repeated the worthy man.

"Yes; where are they?" said the Countess.

"But are they not still with you?"

"Oh, I understand now! they must have come to meet us," said Ermelinda, smiling; "and we missed them; they, no doubt, took another road. You had better send a messenger to fetch them back."

The seneschal now became rather disturbed. "Do you mean," he said, "that they have not been staying with you? They have never arrived here. My master ordered me to be ready to receive him a week ago, but he has never appeared here—and I thought he was all this time in your house at Milan."

"Count!" cried Ermelinda, rushing toward her husband; "imagine, they are not here!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"The children—Beatrice and Ottorino. He says he has not seen them!"

"What is it you tell us, seneschal?" stammered the Count; "that they have not arrived yet?"

"Certainly not. I believed they were at Milan."

"And they did not come here last Saturday?"

"Alas! no; neither on Saturday nor any other day."

"And have you had no news of them—no courier?"

"Nothing, as I tell you."

"It is not possible!"

"Oh, I fear some evil has befallen them!" exclaimed Ermelinda.

"Gracious lady," interrupted the seneschal, "pray believe me, the country is tranquil; a knight might travel through it night and day with his legs on his steed's neck." (This was a way they had at that time of expressing that there was no danger of enemies or marauders.)

"And then," broke in the Count, "they were not alone; besides the waiting-maid, Ottorino had with him his squire and two armed men; and such a party cannot disappear in this way from off the face of the earth."

"But, then, where can they be?" insisted Ermelinda.

"I have been proving to you," answered her husband, "that you must not at once think the worst. Six persons cannot vanish without leaving some trace behind."

"Is it possible they have been lost in the Ticino?"

"Oh, no, it is not full at this season. What say you, seneschal?"

"Well," he answered in a drawling voice, shrugging his shoulders, and then seemed to have nothing more to say—but catching sight of the face of the Countess, he saw her frightened at his dubious answer, so added quickly, "oh, certainly! I think also, if anything serious had happened we should have heard."

The crowd under the portico had increased, and were struggling with each other to procure good places at the windows, to behold the new comers.

Ermelinda begged the seneschal to send everyone quietly away. He accordingly went out, and in a moment all the vassals dispersed, except ten or twelve jesters. These waited to be dismissed with a present. The seneschal sent to fetch the presents already prepared, and distributed them.

One alone among them refused to accept his largess.

"Not that I want a smarter garment, nor that I am more eager for money than my noble comrades," said he, "I have no wish to give myself airs, but I will not leave this castle without having seen the master's face, and whatever I accept shall be from his hands."

"The master is not here," replied the seneschal, brusquely. "If you want it, take it;" and he brandished in front of his face a hood lined with fur.

"What? Ottorino not here! persisted the jester. Then tell me who the lord was who arrived just now on horseback?"

"It was the Count del Balzo."

"Count del Balzo? Take me to him, for he is a friend of mine—tell him I am Tremacoldo, and that I have something to tell him."

At last a bright idea had struck Ermelinda. "Perhaps," she said, "among so many people, there may be some one who can enlighten us."

"You are right," replied the Count; "I will go at once, and order an inquiry to be made, before everybody has gone away." So he went out under the colonnade to speak to the seneschal, and found him there with

Tremacoldo. The jester, on seeing Count Balzo, at once ran to meet him; and taking off his cap, which made all the bells ring, made him a low comic bow, and began to say, "I was just arguing with this rogue, who wished to send me off as if I were a cut-throat, but I came here expressly, because I heard that Ottorino"—

"What? do you know any news of him? Here, come inside," said the Count.

"But what is the meaning of all this?" said Tremacoldo, astonished at the excitement all round him.

"I ask you if you have seen Ottorino and Beatrice?" said the mother.

"No, indeed, I have not seen them."

"Then have you heard anything of them?"

"Yes, I heard that they were not yet arrived at Castelletto; so I thought to myself, the festivities can't be over in that case, and I came at once—a little late, it is true, but"—

"And what were they saying at Sesto?"

"Nothing at all—what would you have them say? And so I came along, and on the road composed a wedding song."

"But had no one seen or heard of them?"

"No one; and to go on with what I was saying—I had prophesied this wedding at Bellano, so you see I had more right than anyone else to make a ballad about it, and here is the very article." So saying, he threw back his cloak, put his hand into his bosom and drew out a paper, which he politely offered to Ermelinda. But in performing this action he uncovered his left side, so that the Count, who was close to him, saw the handle of a dagger, which Tremacoldo had in his girdle, and recognized it as the dagger of one of the grooms whom he had sent with the bridal pair on their journey to Castelletto.

"Where did you get that dagger?" he inquired.

"What dagger?"

"The one you have there."

The jester drew it from his side, and put it into the Count's hands, answering, "I bought it yesterday from an armorer at Gallarate."

"What is it? oh, tell me," asked Ermelinda.

"It is Ricciardino's dagger," exclaimed the Count. And his words caused the lady to become deadly pale.

"I see," said the jester to himself, "that I have put my foot into a difficulty, and I shan't get out of it for nothing." He looked slyly toward the door of the hall, saw his good horse fastened to a pillar of the portico, the doors wide open, the bridge lowered, and thought for a moment of escaping; but he soon gave up the idea. "No," he said to himself, "Tremacoldo is able to hold his head up wherever he goes. I will not have anyone suspect me of sharing in any villainy. I will wait here, and see what it all means."

To the storm of questions that followed, the jester could only repeat his former answers. He, however, at last got a clue to the meaning of all these complications, which he could not comprehend at first; for he now saw that it referred to the disappearance of Ottorino, his wife, and their suite, in which, as he then learned, Lupo was included. So Tremacoldo, moved by the distress of the two poor parents, and remembering the kindness with which Ottorino and Lupo had always treated him, and attracted besides by a love for adventure, resolved to try to trace out the missing party by means of the slight clue he held in his hand. He imparted his generous determination to Ermelinda and the Count with such tenderness and good will that he gained their affections.

The Count warmly accepted the offer, and said, "Had not you better take one of my attendants with you? Ambrose shall go, if you like, as he is father to Lupo and Beatrice's waiting-maid, who has also disappeared with the legate, your uncle."

"No, no," answered the jester, "these are not affairs for more than one to be mixed up in; and a servant of yours showing himself would spoil everything. Only let me know where I am to find you when I have anything to tell."

"We will arrange it in this way," answered Ermelinda. "We will stay three days more at Castelletto, exclusive of to-day. If the Lord, in His mercy, sends us good news, we shall hear it sooner where we are. Your efforts may thus be superfluous, and we may the sooner be released; but if He thinks fit to prove us with a longer trial, after that time you will find us at Milan."

"The jester is a priest," broke in the Count, "and now that the interdict is removed, he wishes to give up his present calling and resume his former one, and he, no doubt, hopes you will use your good offices for him with the legate, your uncle."

"Just so," said Tremacoldo. "I am sure you will do the best you can for me. But, you see," he added, "as long as I carry on my present trade, I must do so with sprightliness and grace; but where was there ever seen before a buffoon who had to act in this way, and talk piously like a Franciscan, not to say like a canon?" Here he made a deep reverence, and went out humming a tune.

The Count followed him, and having rejoined him under the portico, laid a hand on his shoulder and said, "Listen to me, Tremacoldo. While you are working for us, you will want—I know—you are not rich, and this will do you no harm." And as he spoke he tried to slip into his pocket a purse with money, but the jester, stepping back and putting his hand behind him, replied:

"No, to-day I will take nothing; that is to say, on this particular day, and for this particular matter, I don't want any reward."

"Perhaps, instead of money, you would prefer"—

"I want neither money nor anything else; look here, am I not rich? I have still a piece of that chain which Ottorino gave me, and here it is, hanging round my neck. I could live like a prince on one of the rings a day, so you see that I have got my larder provided for a good time to come." So saying, he sprang on his horse, and set off at a foot's pace toward the bridge.

Three days having passed without any news, our poor afflicted travelers returned to Milan; but in the mean time Tremacoldo had not gone to sleep. The first thing he did was to go straight to the shop of the armorer that had sold him the dagger, and pretending that he wished to buy a whole suit of armor for a knight, he led him on from one subject to another, till at last they adjourned to a wineshop. Here they emptied a bottle together, and when he saw the armorer somewhat elated, and inclined to chatter, he began to sound and pump him in a roundabout way.

His companion told him that he had had that dagger to sell, together with a number of other knick-knacks; it had been given him by a relative of his, a vassal and factor of certain nuns living at Rescalinda, and that his relative had acquired it as his share of the plunder of some knights that had been captured one night by brigands, but as to what had become of the prisoners, he did not know.

Tremacoldo spent the week in discussing his pretended bargain with the armorer, holding out constant hopes of closing, and then postponing final settlement from day to day, till at last Sunday arrived. This Sunday was the great feast-day of the district; there were to be sports, and ceremonies, and a great concourse of people. On the Saturday before, Tremacoldo came with his lute round his neck, to fetch the armorer, and they set off together. On the road he did everything in his power to ingratiate himself with his companion; flattering and coaxing—he tried everything; and the result was, that the numskull offered to take him to his relative's house, and he, after some persuasion, accepted the invitation.

The steward of the nunnery, to whom the armorer presented the jester as his customer and friend, was very well pleased to lodge him.

In the evening, Tremacoldo sang, played on the lute, and cracked numberless jokes, such as the company had never heard equaled; he spent the night there. In the morning, he went to pursue his vocation at the fair, and returning to dinner, he found six or seven armed men who had been invited, and immediately made up his mind that they were the accomplices of his host.

They sat down to table, ate and drank, shouted and gabbled.

It happened that toward the end of the repast a roasted peacock was placed on the table. This dish was reserved strictly for knightly banquets, but the steward, in private, among friends and relatives, and on a feast-day, did not scruple to serve something unlawful to do honor to his guests.

"It belongs to the jester," said Tremacoldo, "to carve the peacock, for we enjoy the privileges of chivalry, though we are not knights," and as he spoke he drew his newly-acquired dagger from his side, and plunged it into the body of the splendid bird. The eyes of all the guests were immediately turned on this weapon, the silver handle of which shone brilliantly, and on the part of the blade that was not inserted in the flesh might be distinguished gilded flourishes; the soldiers looked at each other, and one said, "Do you mark that?" Then the master of the house winking at one of the guests, said, "By-the-by, what became of those two simpletons?"

"The mountaineer we have still shut up in the fortress," was the answer: "the other has changed his cage, but I don't think he'll sing there much longer."

When the meal was finished, the soldiers invited the new guest and the rest of the party to crack a bottle with them at the castle. They went there all together, and the jester performed such prodigies in his music and singing that he soon won all their hearts, and when he got up to go in the evening, they made him promise to return the next Sunday. By the scraps of information he obtained, he became pretty certain that Lupo was in the castle, and was shut up in a room looking out on the moat on the north side.

At nightfall the good minstrel, enveloped in his cloak, made a round of the fort, and went on the esplanade up to the window he had his eye on, and having found means to communicate with Lupo, made him understand that he was come to liberate him. The window in question was barricaded by two enormous iron bars, and the wall was thick.

"The door that leads into the interior is not so inaccessible," said Lupo, "but supposing I were able to pick the lock and get out, we should then be but at the beginning, for I should only find myself inside the castle, with the drawbridge raised, and the gates closely guarded."

"I'll see whether I can't get over that difficulty," said the jester, and told him that he had arranged to return there the next Sunday, and before that day he would come to see him again.

Tremacoldo had two buffoons' costumes made exactly alike, with certain strange caps, having beneath them a silk net, to imitate chain armor, which could be drawn over the face and represent a visor.

No one could be surprised at any costume worn by those whose trade is to make others laugh. In the middle of Saturday night, Tremacoldo took one of these costumes and caps under his arm, and repairing to Lupo's prison, he stood on the edge of the moat, and by the help of a pole, he passed them in to him separately, explaining to him how he was to use them.

The desired Sunday morning came at last. The jester arrived at the castle in a novel dress, with a parti-colored cap. He sang, played, danced, and performed endless tricks, and drawing over his face the silk network, kept lifting it up and dropping it again, chattering all the time. At last came the moment appointed for the quintain match, in which the soldiers of the castle were to contend with some other men-at-arms from a neighboring fort. After a few rounds, Tremacoldo presented himself before the most successful player, offering to run two lances against him, and whoever was adjudged to be the winner should have as his prize the horse of the other.

"Hello, my friend!" called out the man whom he had challenged, "don't think you are going to get off with one of your tricks as you did down at Milan."

"What's the good of telling me that?" replied the buffoon; "the cask can yield only the wine it contains. Look here, my jewel, this isn't quite fair play; your horse is a great coarse beast, and mine is an elegant little swan in comparison."

"That's true," said one of the leaders; "bring another horse for Tremacoldo, and let his be taken to a stall, to abide the decision of the umpires of the quintain match."

On this a magnificent bay horse, the very one taken from Ottorino, was brought out.

"This will do capitally," said the jester. "I have not another word to say."

A trumpet then sounded, which was heard all over the castle, and reached the ears of a person about whom no one was thinking just then, except the jester. His adversary then gave his horse his head, and putting spurs to his side, galloped over the intervening space, struck the mark in the center, and amid the shouts of "Bravo! bravo!" he returned to the starting-post, set spurs to his horse again, and drove his lance straight into the Saracen's visor, a feat that was greeted with a fresh storm of applause.

Now came Tremacoldo's turn, but where was he? A page was holding the horse destined for him, but he was not there.

At last he appeared, bounding down the steps. To spring on his horse, to grasp his lance, to charge the quintain, and strike it, to smash the pole on which it was fixed and overturn the whole erection, was the work of a minute. The jester (or rather Lupo, dressed exactly like him), turned his horse rapidly round, crossed the courtyard, and passing through the barbican and over the drawbridge, galloped off like the wind.

The crowd rushed frantically after him and saw him take the high road and ride straight away.

"Tremacoldo! Tremacoldo! the horse is yours! you are the winner!" they shouted.

While the false Tremacoldo was making the best of his way off, the real one was hidden in the castle. How on earth was he to get out, without the trick being discovered?

Besides the principal gate, there was in the fortress a postern, which opened into the second courtyard where the stables were, and which the jester had made the scene for his projects of escape. He had hardly finished giving the challenge, when he took the keeper of this gate aside, and telling him that the wager, as seemed probable, was merely a joke, persuaded him to keep it open for him, and to have his horse in readiness, giving him to understand that he meant to go out secretly by that exit, and to come back unexpectedly through the great gate for a bit of fun.

His companion being a cheery, simple sort of fellow, agreed to everything he required; the doors were thrown open, the horse was found all ready, he himself gave the buffoon a leg up into the saddle; shut the door very gently as soon as he saw him go out, and then ran back into the principal courtyard to see him return.

So away went Lupo along the high road at full speed, while Tremacoldo was doing the same through the woods below, and at nightfall they met in Milan, at the house of Count del Balzo.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WAITING BRIDE

LUPO had had so many hairbreadth escapes in his life, his parents had so often been in anxiety for his sake, they had so often felt the comfort of seeing him emerge from mortal peril safe and sound, that they might have become hardened by this time. But this was not the case.

But all their joy was dashed by the thought of poor Lauretta, of whom he could tell his parents nothing, nor they him.

Ermelinda and the Count made the falconer's son repeat the minutest particulars of the strange adventures in which he had been involved; but the youth could give them small satisfaction; since the moment when he had left Beatrice at Gallarate, to go to Seprio in search of Ottorino, he knew nothing of the vanished party. He himself was captured treacherously by some armed men, before reaching the castle; his eyes were bandaged, and after being dragged hither and thither, he was at last thrown into the prison from which he had just been rescued by Tremacoldo.

Everything connected with the affair was mysterious; the only clue to it was from the incident of Marco's letter, on receiving which Ottorino had hastened to Castel Seprio.

It is true that the signature might have been forged by those who had contrived the plot against the bridal pair. Lupo was of this opinion, and the Count, who at the first mention of Marco's name had been much perturbed, welcomed this explanation with avidity, and the determination of a person desirous to catch at any reassuring suggestion. But Ermelinda, who knew of the love of Visconti for her daughter, felt certain that she had in truth been carried off by him. She would not reveal this to her husband, for fear of being prevented by his cowardly fears from pursuing a plan she had proposed to herself, which seemed to have some promise of success.

She therefore summoned Lupo privately to her own apartments, and said:

"Pray attend to me; I have a very serious and important charge to lay upon you. Will you undertake it for the sake of your former master and mistress? There is no one I can trust as much as you."

"Oh, my gracious lady!" replied Lupo, much affected, and also a little mortified by the hesitation with which the Countess spoke; "Am I not your own Lupo, your servant? the first bread I ever ate, did I not eat it in your house? my father, my mother, my poor sister, have they not always slept under your roof? have they not all been clothed, fed, protected by you? Now, my lady, be so good as to tell me how you have thought of employing me; so that I may be as useful to you as I am faithful."

"I wish to send you to Lucca, to bear to Marco a letter from me," said Ermelinda.

"And is that all?" replied Lupo. "To present myself before Marco! You could not have given me a more acceptable commission."

"Listen, Lupo; I know that if he is not utterly changed from what he once was—if his former nature has not entirely disappeared, you take no risk."

"Forgive me, gracious mistress, but this is a kind of thing that cannot be imagined for a moment. The idea that I could ever suspect Marco, the prince of men! Do you know that, even if, instead of being the poor devil

I am, I were a great baron, a prince, or even a king, and at the same time his greatest enemy, I would put my head in his lap, and sleep as quietly and safely as if I had laid it on my own pillow? The love and devotion I feel for that man is so great, that if he wished to kill me it would not appear hard to me, and I should think it a good way of losing my life, so much so, that, next to sacrificing it for the faith, I could not desire a better end."

"Then you will go?"

"With all my heart! and I assure you I am longing to be off."

"What makes me most anxious," said Ermelinda, "is the fear that those who interrupted your journey before may again play you an ill turn."

"And for that reason I will set off directly, and secretly," said Lupo; "so that they may not have time to make preparations."

"Well, then, here is the letter," said the Countess. "I feel, also, that the more haste in these matters the better."

"I will run down," returned Lupo, "and eat a few mouthfuls, kiss my father and mother, and then set off at once."

"Farewell, my good Lupo," said the Countess; "the Lord be with you!"

As Lupo went out of the gates to begin his journey, he suddenly came upon Lodrisio, who was passing on horseback, accompanied by two squires. He was acquainted with this noble, and knew that, although there was an old grudge between him and Ottorino, neither of them had ever passed the limits of those laws of civility which, as everybody knows, survive friendship; and so, taking off his cap, he bowed to his master's relative and went on his way, without remarking the sudden start of surprise that the knight could not control on seeing him.

Lodrisio had received the day before a letter from Pelagrua, who was on his way to the castle of Rosate, to confer on their common concerns.

This knight, after he had recovered from his first astonishment at the sight of his prisoner, whom he had fancied in a very different place than Milan, and in a very different state from that of a traveler, said a few words in the ear of one of his squires, who made an affirmative sign, and remained behind.

"What demon can have brought that fellow here?" was the inward thought of the rider, as he hurried on to Rosate. "Will nothing succeed with me? there must be some unlucky star, some evil influence over me, at this period! And where can the rascal be going in traveling-garb? most likely to his hills."

The squire in attendance on Lodrisio, seeing his master so out of temper, did not dare to say a word, and followed him in silence, casting an occasional stealthy glance at him, like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs. The knight went pricking along, pondering over all his various anxieties, about Marco, Beatrice, Ottorino—how to remedy this, how to provide for that.

When he arrived at Rosate, he retired into a private chamber with Pelagrua, and asked at once if the last courier had arrived from Lucca.

"He is come, and here are Marco's papers," replied the seneschal, giving him a packet of letters. He opened them, and sitting down, read them in silence for some time. When he had finished, Lodrisio shook his head, and said, shrugging his shoulders, "It is as usual; the Germans are going on badly, and the Lucchese worse. The former are like a bottomless cask, which the river Po never could fill, when at its highest; the latter are so stingy, that they would not give a farthing to save their skin from the Turks, or from the devil himself: the one set are always howling for money, and the others as continually screech out a refusal; and Marco has to act as go-between, and keep the peace between the two. In short, he is so disgusted and indignant with it all, that he is nearly decided on the course that he would not hear of before, that is, to sell his suzerainty to the Florentines, and wash his hands of the whole concern."

"Should this come to pass," said Pelagrua, "he will be glad to attend to his affairs here again."

"Certainly; and that thread, by which we reckoned on holding him, will be but one among many, I can see."

"One among many," replied the seneschal. I shall be glad if we get off as well as that. I am sadly afraid lest this should spoil our cards so much that we may not get a game out of them at all."

"Where do you get those foolish fears?"

"I'll soon tell you. I dropped a hint to Marco, in the most distant way, to prepare him a little for the present state of affairs."

"And how did he receive it?"

"Far from receiving it favorably, he seemed as if he were about to devour my poor messenger alive, and he wrote to me that I must not meddle any more between Beatrice and Ottorino. Suppose his affairs have cured his love?"

"All the better! If this madness leaves him, he will give himself up to more serious undertakings—to his own interests; which, in the end, are ours."

"I agree—but in the mean time what am I to do with this fair lady?"

"What we settled before—keep her, by fair or foul means, to wait for Marco's pleasure. Don't you believe that when he returns and finds her here, all in the bloom of her beauty, he will be grateful to you; even supposing his first mania for her to have somewhat subsided?"

"May heaven grant it! You don't know what her whims and fancies are! She has been here twenty days, and she actually believes she is still at Castelletto. I never have dared to"—

"Much ado about nothing! What a fool you are!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when you see you can do nothing by gentle means, you should change your tactics; you don't know anything about women."

"But, I tell you, a breath would blow this one out."

"Let her do what she will, but don't mince matters any more with her."

"It is very easy for you to talk like this, but you should have been here the fourth day she was in the Castle; she was seized with a desperate fever; I was afraid that it would be the end of her, and that any hour might be her last. If she really had died, it would have been a pretty kettle of fish! And you must remember the other girl is with her."

"The maid, you mean? a great matter indeed! Well, how at last did you get her round?"

"I got her round by means of a letter from her lover, which I let her have."

"A letter from Ottorino!" cried Lodrisio, with an expression half agitated and half incredulous.

"From Ottorino—but don't be angry, for I stand for Ottorino."

"You wrote the letter?"

"I wrote it and imitated his hand."

"And what did you say?"

"First of all I was obliged to explain my delay in coming to see her, was I not? So I treated her to some fair words—how Marco had received me most affectionately, that he is desirious of sending me into Tuscany, and does not leave me to myself for a moment, day or night. That I have not dared as yet to inform him of our marriage, finding that his mind was still the same on that subject, but that when I had been able to be of great service to him, I hoped to induce him to hear reason—in short, a thousand fibs of this sort, filled up with the usual sugarplums of lovers' tender oaths, and hopes, to soothe the sweet martyr of love."

Lodrisio burst out into a coarse laugh, and then added: "And did she take it all in, suspecting nothing?"

"I firmly believe," answered the seneschal, "that if the letter had fallen into Ottorino's own hands he would have believed he had written it himself."

"Well—then?"

"Then she answers, and Ottorino replies to her; she writes a second time, and Ottorino likewise, and so on, everything goes on smoothly as possible—and if you could only see the sweet, tender things she writes me! the devotion with which she opens my letters, devours them with her eyes, and weeps over them! and then how tenderly she folds them with her white hands, and puts them in her bosom, and then takes them out to read them again, and kiss them! I enjoy the sight through a chink in the wall, and I swear to you, the game begins to amuse me."

"You dried-up old mummy! You old Pharisee!" said Lodrisio, giving him a cuff on his face; "now, with these childish tricks, you have been spending your time, so that twenty days have been wasted."

"But I have not wasted them at all. I have begun already to give things a turn—but one must work very cautiously, for the least thing makes her nervous, and she is so delicate that she would be swooning directly."

"Well, tell me quickly, how far you have gone?"

"I have begun to play off a little jealousy, arising from Marco's continually speaking of her, and praising her up to the skies."

"And what does she say to that?"

"She swears and protests that she is devoted to me, and me alone, as you may imagine; but still you have but to throw a seed into a woman's heart, and it always takes root and bears fruit. After all, girls and women, rich and poor, are all made of the same clay."

"Well, you have not done badly on the whole, only you are too long about it. We shall have only got half way by the end of the year, and we have no time to lose, I can tell you; for Marco may arrive within the next two months, if not earlier—and now, on what terms are you with this whimsical girl?"

"Now she is expecting me in two days. I have taken this line, in order to recover her from the distress she was thrown into at being disappointed of her mother's promised visit. When she first got this news, she appeared quite comforted, but since yesterday, for some reason or other, she is more downhearted than she was at first. She says nothing, but only weeps, and will not touch food. I hope she will hold out, for even if I am able to supply her with another letter to-morrow, the deceit cannot last much longer, she must begin to suspect something soon, and then I shall be at my wit's end how to keep her quiet."

"The chief thing," said Lodrisio, "is to bring the thing to a head as soon as possible, for I have another bit of news for you—Lupo has escaped."

"Escaped!" exclaimed Pelagrua, in alarm.

"Yes, escaped, and I saw him with my own eyes, on my way here; but I have placed him in good hands; before sunset—but never mind, when I have written to Lucca, we will talk it over again, and see what we had better do."

After writing as proposed, and arranging his plans, the sensechal of Rosate, toward evening, conducted Lodrisio by winding passages and secret corridors into a dark room, whence, looking through some chinks, he could see all over the room, where Beatrice was alone with her faithful maid.

Ottorino's forsaken wife was seated on a sumptuous couch, in a languid attitude, resting her pale face on her hand. A light garment drooped from her shoulders, and wrapped her in its ample folds. Her long fair hair, parted in the middle, followed the outline of her face, which stood out deadly white against the gold, not relieved by the slightest touch of color, except the lips, which were of a faint red. Her great blue eyes were the most striking feature in her face, for with the softness of angelic innocence, they yet expressed the fire of a generous soul. While they shone with quiet maidenly pride, they had also a tender and liquid glance, appealing, as it were, for sympathy and affection, and their mute, supplicating expression was increased by the piteous circumstances in which she now found herself.

Lauretta, seated at a table placed between her and her mistress, was working at some embroidery, from which she had just raised her head.

Beatrice, with her cheek resting on her hand, had her face turned toward the maiden, as if watching the work —but she did not really see it, for her whole soul at that moment was overshadowed by a secret terror.

At last she rose to her feet and walked wearily to the open window. She leaned on the sill and gazed in silence on the scene before her. The setting sun, slowly sinking behind the crest of a distant wood, shed its level rays on the wide plain, broken only by the sparse, unrefreshing shadows cast by a solitary tree, appearing at rare intervals on that vast expanse of desert.

A sunset so different in all its characteristics from those glorious departing rays which she had so often watched disappear behind her own dear native mountains, recalled, with a bitter pang, those loved scenes to the unhappy exile. She rose from the window, seated herself again by the little table, where a lamp was burning, placed there an instant before by the careful hand of Lauretta, and sinking into a chair, she exclaimed, in the agony of her heart, "Oh, my God, my suffering is greater than I can bear!"

There was a moment's silence, then the faithful attendant went to the balcony to close the outer shutters, when the faint sound of a lute reached her ear. Lauretta paused, with her hand on the shutter; her mistress placed her finger on her lips, and listened eagerly. That plaintive air was surely familiar to her. She rose with restored strength, returned swiftly to the window, and leaned out again to catch every sound; then she said, in an undertone to Lauretta, "It is the prelude to the rondinella; but hark! the song is about to begin." And in truth the voice, though somewhat distant, fell distinctly on her ear, accompanied by the feeble and melodious sound of the instrument.

Swallow, ever wand'ring swallow,
  Alighting near my cell,
Where, day by day, thy plaintive lay
  Dost, soft recording, tell.
What would'st thou in thy song declare,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air?

In drear oblivion, sad, alone,
  Left by thy cruel mate,
Do thy tears flow, to mourn my woe,
  Or for thy widowed state?
No matter, sing the grief we share,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

Yet less than mine thy misery,
  Bird with untiring wings,
Whose pinions sweep, o'er lake and steep,
  Tho' sad thy carol rings,
Calling thy mate, with ceaseless care,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

Oh! if like thee!........But here, in prison
Confined by hapless fate,
Where light of day nor sun's sweet ray
Can ever penetrate,
Whence scarce ascends my plaintive prayer
To thee, sweet Pilgrim of the air.

With swift step cometh chill September,
When thou away wilt flee
To foreign lands, and far-off strands,
Where earth, and sky, and sea
Will greet thee with their welcome fair,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

And each day than the last still sadder,
Which bids me wake to tears,
'Mid storms that blow, and winter snow,
Thy song will fill mine ears;
Mourning o'er me with tender care,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

When the spring-tide lures thee homeward,
A cross will mark this spot.
Stay then thy flight, and there alight,
Sweet bird, forget it not!
And let thy song calm peace declare,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUSPICION

"THAT must be Tremacoldo," cried Beatrice, quite revived, as soon as the song had ceased; "I recognize his voice. Oh, perhaps he has come to give me some news. If I could only see him! If I could see a face I know, that would give me confidence and clear up all my doubts."

"But what doubts have you? Why are you so agitated? Your husband will be here in two days; he has promised you this. Why, then"—

"Hush!" interrupted the mistress, putting her finger on her lips.

They remained for some time longer in silence, hoping for the song to begin again; but they heard nothing more except the howling of dogs.

Beatrice, having at last lost all hope, returned to her seat by the table, and looking at the damsel who was closing the window, she said, continuing her interrupted speech:

"Do you ask why I am so suspicious and why I am so agitated?"

And she uttered these words in the almost agonized tone of one who has a tremendous secret to reveal; but then she turned her eyes on her companion in misfortune, who, at that moment, came to sit down by her, and sighing deeply, said no more.

"What is it?" said Lauretta, anxiously. "Do you know anything fresh? Is there some mystery? Tell me, pray tell me!"

"No, no, be quiet; it is nothing."

"How can I be quiet? Since yesterday I have noticed you have had something on your mind that you wished to hide from me. Do tell me!"

"Let me alone," repeated the lady.

But the damsel, taking her hand affectionately, and pressing it between hers, said, in a voice full of emotion:

"Dear Beatrice, my sweet mistress, have you not promised me that you would share all the good and evil in your life with me?"

"Oh, my good Lauretta!" replied Beatrice, trying to restrain her tears, "it is a great addition to my grief to think of you, who, for my sake, have left your loving parents and your peaceful home for an uncertain fate. But God is merciful, He will save you. Believe me, that I pray to Him for you often in the midst of my mortal anguish."

"Alas!" said the maiden, still more dismayed, "your words point to some misfortune. Don't let me be kept in suspense."

Beatrice in reply rose and opened a casket on her table.

"Do you see," she said, "the papers contained in this?"

"Yes; they are the letters your husband writes to you every day."

"So I believed, and that was the last thread on which my life hung; now that thread is broken—the letters did not come from Ottorino."

"May the Lord have mercy on us!" cried Lauretta, becoming as pale as death. "But who could—how did you find it out?"

"Yesterday you brought me this white rose which I am wearing in my bosom, did you not?"

"Yes; it was given me by the old woman who brings our food."

"And you told me the seneschal's wife sent it to me?"

"I did."

"Do you know who she is?"

"I know she is Pelagrua's wife, the woman your mother received into the castle the day when she came there with her child."

"Well, she remembers that kindness in these days of my misery, and cannot bear to see me any longer the sport of these infernal machinations. Between these rose leaves I found a letter hidden which warns me of treachery. Imagine my horror when I made this discovery! Who can tell what has become of Ottorino? Who can assure me that he is still alive? for I cannot believe he has forsaken me. Where are my parents? And where are we ourselves? Oh, my God! in whose hands can we be? If this really is Ottorino's castle, and not rather —for there is nothing cruel and terrible which I do not imagine."

"Oh, mercy! mercy on us poor creatures!" exclaimed Lauretta.

"Now, I will tell you," continued her mistress," the principal cause of my terror. You must know that the night when I went with my father and aunt to the banquet at Marco Visconti's palace"—

But at this moment her story was interrupted by a noise at the door that opened on the gallery. Some one had knocked, and the maid was getting up to answer it, when Beatrice drew her back, and said quietly to her:

"Don't move from here; I will not have you open to anyone."

"Lauretta! Lauretta!" the well-known voice of Pelagrua called from outside, "there is a knight here with news of Ottorino, and he wishes to speak at once with your mistress."

"Say to him," said she, under her breath, "that at this late hour I can see no one, but that I will receive him to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Let him come to-morrow. She cannot see him now."

Thus the maid spoke through the door in an uncertain voice, shaking all over, as if seized with an ague fit.

"He must speak to her this moment," cried Pelagrua; "he has some good news to give her. Now, open the door; it will be better for her. Now, are you going to open, yes or no? Silly girl! You had better take care what you are about!"

And all this time he went on belaboring the door with his hands and feet, but in vain; for the two prisoners, clasped in each other's arms, and trembling like two frightened doves, never answered a word; and the door could not be opened from without, as it was fastened inside with a large bolt.

After a time the noise ceased, as also did Pelagrua's voice, and silence again reigned. The two terrified women were beginning to breathe again, when they felt behind a draught, which blowing suddenly on the slight flame of the lamp, nearly extinguished it. They both turned quickly in that direction, and through an opening in the wall, which had been concealed by the hangings, they saw two men advance into the room.

Lauretta, covering her eyes with her hands, uttered a scream, and sank on the couch; but Beatrice, rising with dignity to her feet, leaned one hand on the table, and turning to Pelagrua, whom, as well as Lodrisio, she recognized, she said with a calm and stately manner:

"Seneschal, you have, it seems to me, mistaken this room. It belongs to me, whom you are accustomed to call your master's wife!"

The anger the girl felt at this uncourteous and abominable behavior had overcome her alarm. She felt her spirit and her strength return. Her cheeks regained their color; her eyes shone with the vivid light which had so long left them; and a degree of security and fortitude was expressed in her whole person.

The two rogues were struck with surprise, and even with a momentary, but irresistible feeling of reverence. The diabolical eyes of Pelagrua fell beneath the lady's glance, and even Lodrisio seemed at first quite disconcerted; his cold and cruel smile was discomposed, the jesting and familiar words died on his lips, with which he was about to insult his victim, and bowing his head in proof of a humility at any rate sincere for a time, he stammered:

"Forgive me, lady. I did not think"—and was about to retrace his steps; but then recovering himself, he added, "I hoped, as I came to speak to you of Ottorino, my news would have been a passport to your presence."

Beatrice, whose shadowy fears had taken a more solid form at the sight of her husband's implacable enemy, replied to him without being able to conceal a sudden shudder:

"Sir knight, do not insult the misery of an innocent creature. I tremble at the idea of being in your power, as he is, perhaps, also, of whom you have just spoken, and whose name on your lips only seems to me as a snare. If this be so, I have no other defense but tears and indignant words. I am a weak woman, entrapped into this unknown abode, far from all who would protect me, with no other witness of my persecution but this poor girl." Here she pointed to her damsel, who raised her eyes a little, cheered by these words, hoping that they would touch their tormentors' hearts. "I am in your hands," continued Beatrice, in a tone that seemed almost inspired, "I am like a reed that you can break at your pleasure; but there is a God above us, to whom the most hidden corner of the earth is visible, and before whom all strength is powerless; a God who sees the tears of the afflicted, and will demand an account from those who cause them to flow."

Lodrisio, intensely irritated at finding himself unmasked, and braved in this way by a child, and ashamed of Pelagrua's presence and of his own first uncontrollable impulse of diffidence and respect, had now resumed his former character, and that air of bold, sneering familiarity which he had dropped for a time.

"Listen to me, my young lady," he said; "do you think these arrogant airs suit a pretty maiden like yourself? They don't become you at all, and you had better lay them aside;" and so saying, he advanced toward her.

"Do not come near me!" cried the girl, in great alarm, and then running to the window, she flung it open with all her force. "Keep away from me!"

"Be quiet, you mad child, I am not going to eat you. Look at me—I won't move; and I will step back again if you please. Are you satisfied now?—what would you have? I only wanted to speak to you for your good."

"For my good?" said the maiden, "then go away at once; that is all the good you can do me."

"Is there nothing else I can do for you?"

"Ah, yes! you can, indeed; you can take me out of this anguish, restore me to my parents, and let me die in peace in the arms of my poor mother. Oh, do this, if you have any mercy in you; do it for the sake of all that is dear to you in this world; do it for the love of God."

As soon as Beatrice had finished speaking, Lodrisio continued in cruel, pitiless tones:

"Do you think I mean to do you any harm, child? You are making yourself of too much importance; for I assure you I am not thinking about you at all, so don't be afraid that I am going to injure you; stand up, and look me in the face, for I am not a monster, and listen to what I have to say to you. I see that you already know more about things in general than I thought; I am glad of it, for we shall come to an agreement more rapidly. You must know, then, that Ottorino, who was to become your husband"—

"Is he still alive?" exclaimed the girl, in breathless anxiety.

"Let me finish quietly—alive or not, you will have nothing to do with him in future."

Beatrice trembled all over, so that the knight added quickly:

"Yes, he is alive; make yourself easy, for he is alive."

"And I can assure you also," broke in Pelagrua, "that he is safe and sound, and will soon depart for his projected journey to the Holy Land."

"Do you mean without me?" exclaimed Beatrice. "No, that cannot be true! How cruel you are to torment me in this way! What have I done to you? What harm have I ever done you?" And, overcome with anguish, she bent her head down, and burst into an agony of tears, which, however, she soon cut short, raising her head in fear, lest some one should approach her.

Pelagrua, glancing at his companion, pursed up his lips, and shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "What do you think of your fine plans? You would act according to your own ideas; see what you have done." But the wicked knight only answered him with a shake of his head, and an impatient gesture. He turned again to the girl, and said:

"You are weeping, poor child. I really pity you; you have cared for him for a long time, and now must tear him from your heart; but what can you do? You must make a virtue of necessisty. Love passes; you will see, very soon, believe me, it will all be gone. And then, to speak clearly to you, if you really are fond of him, you would wish, above everything, to save his life. Now, do you know that his life and death are in your hands?"

"Oh, what do you say?" exclaimed Beatrice, struck with a new terror; "and can I put faith in your words? Is there not some deceit hidden in them? Have pity on me—on a poor, forsaken, tormented creature. Tell me the truth; look at me. I pray to you with the same agony with which, in the last moments of your life, you yourself will implore the Supreme Judge to give you His pardon; grant this my prayer as you will wish Him to grant yours at that tremendous moment; tell me, by the eternal safety of your soul, or by its eternal damnation, tell me if this danger of Ottorino is real, and what I can do to save him."

The villain, who, like even the worst men of his age, believed in God and in a future life, after his own fashion, could not help feeling a little shaken by these words, spoken in tones that seemed almost inspired. After a few minutes which he spent in summoning up his wonted audacity, he recovered himself and, dropping the familiarity of his tone, he answered with perceptible agitation:

"The danger is real—yes, I can guarantee that on my own soul—and it is true that you can save him."

"And where is he? And what is the peril? And what can I do for him?"

"Oh, you want to know too much at once. There are things, my lady, which cannot be spoken of, and which it is not well to ask about. All I can tell you now is this—that if you will be sensible, Ottorino need not die. I promise you that, on my faith as a Christian knight, and to show my sincerity, I call upon God to strike this hand of mine with leprosy if I have any intention of deceiving you. Ottorino will not die; he may go away into Palestine, as the seneschal was saying, but it must be your part to persuade him to go, for it is the best thing for himself that he could do."

"And what do you want of me? Tell me how I can save him. If my blood—my life"—

"No, poor child—keep yourself calm. Do not look at me with those frightened eyes; come forward, sit down, and be at your ease; do not suspect me, nor anyone else, for all here wish to pay as much respect to you as to a queen; and you are mistress here, this is your own house."

"Is it really so? Then this is the fortress of Castelletto. I am indeed in the house of my husband."

"Have done with that expression! Ottorino is not your husband."

Beatrice raised her hands to heaven, and remained quite stupefied, without uttering a word, and only staring at her tormentor, who continued:

"That nonsensical ceremony you went through at Milan has no meaning whatever; you are still an unmarried maiden, and can give your hand to whom it pleases you. And do you wish to know in whose castle you are? It belongs to a great baron; to a powerful and formidable noble, before whom even princes bend with respect; and he bends to nothing except the beauty of your face."

Lauretta, seeing that her mistress could not speak, asked in a trembling voice, "Oh, my God, where are we?"

"At Rosate," answered the other, quickly; "in Marco Visconti's castle."

On hearing these words, Ottorino's wife fell in a dead swoon in her attendant's arms, who, amidst her tears, drew her to the bed, and raising her, placed her on it, repelling with horror and loathing the wicked hands that offered to help in this pious duty.

While these things were going on at Rosate, Lupo, tired of traveling all day, dismounted at a small inn, and put his horse up in a stable, and after attending to it with his own hands, went into the kitchen to get some supper. It was ready in a few minutes; the traveler placed himself at the table, and refreshed himself with such fare as the place afforded, and then asked the host to find him a bed.

"I will give you one in a room close by," said the landlord, and taking a lamp, he preceded his guest to the place in question; but they had not yet left the kitchen when two armed men entered, one of whom, after glancing at Lupo, slapped the landlord familiarly on the back, and said to him, "Jacopotto, here we are, two men and two horses, and shall not leave till dawn."

The host put down the light, turned to Lupo, and said he would come back directly, and then taking the newcomer by the arm, led him to the chimney, where he leaned down to uncover a pot of broth with some mutton in it, and said, "See how savory it smells."

The man to whom these words were addressed also bent forward, as if to get a better view, and, approaching the innkeeper, whispered something in his ear.

He replied aloud, "Now, I will take you to the stable, where this stranger has a horse. It will be rather difficult to get three in, but we will do our best."

So saying, they went out, and were soon followed by the other man-at-arms, who had as yet not spoken.

Lupo sauntered to the door opening on the stable-yard, and saw the host engaged in earnest conversation with his two friends on one side of it. On seeing him they separated, and went outside the gate one by one.

"Who can these soldiers be?" he said. "There must be something underhand in all this; I must be on my guard."

The host soon returned, and under pretence of wishing to give him better accommodation, offered him a different room, saying it was quieter and had a better bed in it.

Lupo did not believe in all this apparent anxiety, which only confirmed his suspicions that some trick was intended; so he replied with another artifice, that as two fresh horses had arrived he must look after his own, which was a dangerous animal, and must therefore sleep in the stable, and nothing his host could urge was able to shake his determination.

He then went to the stable, and stroked his faithful horse, which turned to neigh to him in answer, saying to himself he had better depart at once. But then he reflected, "The beast is tired, and may well be so, poor thing; fifty miles at one stretch."

Meanwhile he went on caressing the good charger, which had again returned to his corn.

"Besides, how should I get along, on these roads, and at this time of night? I must wait till morning, and keep awake meanwhile, the nights are not long, and I can well watch for four or five hours."

Having settled this, he threw himself on a heap of straw, with a firm determination not to go to sleep.

He then began to reflect as to why the host should be so anxious all at once to give him a more convenient room, especially as he was unknown to him, and certainly had not a very aristocratic appearance.

At last, by dint of recalling minutely to his mind every look, even the most transient, of those three sinister countenances, he remembered to have noticed a peculiar leer on one of them, which he had a confused notion of having seen somewhere before.

The next thing was to think over the various persons he had seen between his escape and the present moment. He tried to remember everyone's face whom he had met on the road; but he could not conjure up anything bearing the faintest resemblance to that demoniacal leer; then he ran over in his mind the Count and Countess and the members of their household. Nothing there. Then again—oh, yes—he had remounted and ridden through the courtyard gates. "Ah, that was it!" he exclaimed to himself. "I have got it! That traitorous grin!" And, in fact, he had observed it that very day on the face of one of Lodrisio's attendants, whom he remembered to have stumbled upon while in the very act of leaving the house.

"You are very cleverly disguised, you scamp!" he thought, "but I know you! That's the man, I'll lay my life on it!"

Then he thought the plot must be deep-laid, and not unlikely to be connected with that to which he and his master had before fallen victims; and to the faces of the three ruffians who had been so long floating before his imagination, he now added a fourth—that of a still more consummate scoundrel, by name Lodrisio.

In the midst of these reflections a sudden thought came into his head: "How can such a rascal as this be so great a friend of Marco's?"

Now it is scarcely credible, but so it was, that the mere fact of that hero's name flitting across Lupo's brain had the effect of dissipating, by degrees, all those ideas that had been rushing through it so recently and with such rapidity.

This did not take place, however, without his hearing from time to time the voice of an internal monitor bidding him to be on his guard; but, worn out as he was by his long ride and by the nights and days passed in that horrible prison, and also by the tension of mind he had just gone through, the poor fellow at last let everything slip, and by degrees closed his eyes, and soon was in the land of oblivion.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PERILOUS JOURNEY

WHILE in this state he dreamed he was at Lucca, and in a richly-furnished apartment, in company with Marco Visconti; but the Marco before him had a vacant face and staring, glassy eyes. Lupo spoke to him, but received no answer; he held out to him Ermelinda's letter, but no hand was stretched out to take it. But what strange change was happening now? The hangings, gilding, and ornaments of the room suddenly vanished; the walls, besides appearing quite bare, seemed to become dark, rough, and contracted. The gilded ceiling turned into a black and heavy vaulted roof, the pavement became a dunghill.

Here a confused medley of whispering voices struck the sleeper's ear, and a light flashed across his eyes, which were still closed. He made an attempt to rise—to speak—to draw his dagger, but, do what he would, he could not put one foot before the other; his voice seemed choked, and his arms dropped paralyzed by his side.

He remained a few moments in this condition, when on awaking he found his throat tightly clutched, and a heavy weight on his body; he shook himself, and opening his eyes, found it was not a dream. The two ruffians of the previous evening were leaning on his chest; one was throttling him, while the other was trying to stab him with a dagger, while the host behind them, with a lantern in his hand, was crying out, "Hold him tight—take care he does not get up, and you, Passerino, strike him hard! run him through the heart."

"He has armor under his doublet, and the point won't act," answered the latter.

"Then let me finish him," said the landlord; "hold him down both of you"—and, laying down his lantern, he ran to fetch the bar of the door.

Lupo, after some fruitless efforts to escape from that powerful pressure, at last succeeded in rolling over, so that he and the two rogues were soon struggling together under the legs of one of the horses. The animal, terrified at the noise and confusion he heard beneath him, and gradually becoming infuriated, took to kicking and plunging as far as the halter would allow, and then began stamping first on one, then on another, of the three men thus entangled together, who were at last obliged to let each other go, and separate in order to get out of range of the horse's hoofs. The Limontese was the first to spring on his feet; out came his sword in the twinkling of an eye, and seeing the landlord before him, who had kept back all the time, partly from a prudent fear of the horse's heels, partly because, in that medley of heads, legs, and arms, he could not distinguish between friend and foe, he rushed at him and buried the weapon in his stomach with such force that he felt the hilt strike against his body.

"Take that, and that!" said Lupo, as he saw him fall to the ground streaming with blood; then he turned furiously on one of the other highwaymen, who having just at that moment extricated himself from the horse's legs, was coming at him, with a devilish grin of scorn and rage on his countenance, just such a grin as he had spent so much time in picturing to himself that night before he fell asleep. "Oh, it's you, is it?" cried out Lupo; "this is the way they murder Christians in these parts, I suppose?" and so saying, he gave the villain such a tremendous backhanded blow that, in the first place he cut through the fellow's right hand, which, together with his dagger, he held aloft to try to parry the blow, and then ran him right through the cheek. The sanguinary monster remaining erect for an instant, clenched with a horrible grimace the two white rows of his teeth that were laid bare by the blow; he then reeled from side to side, clutching at the air with his remaining hand and the bloody stump of the other, like one bereft of his senses, and at last fell against the wall, deluging it with his blood.

Only the third assassin remained now, and he, seeing how things were going, had tried to escape on all fours between the horses, and having succeeded in passing all but one, had now risen to his feet, and was edging round the back of this last to gain the door, when the beast, maddened by all the confusion, flung out behind so furiously that it would have gone ill with him if he had been caught. But strange to say, this very circumstance saved him; the horse, straining violently, broke his halter and escaped from the stable, and the man, seeing him pass close by, caught hold of his mane, leaped on his back and in a moment was away across the fields. Lupo, after pursuing him for a time, saw that it was lost labor and returned to the hostelry, watching to see that others did not come in the mean time to give him a disagreeable reception. But the inn was solitary and out of the way, inhabited only by the landlord and his wife, the latter despatched to spend that night with one of her gossips, so as to manage this murderous plot in an easier manner; and therefore, notwithstanding all the noise, no living soul had appeared on the scene.

Lupo entered the yard, and came to the stable, where he found only the two he had left there; Lodrisio's squire was dead, but the landlord, holding up his hand all dripping with blood, stretched it toward him, saying: "For mercy's sake—I have a burning thirst—you will find outside a tub full of water; bring me a sip, for I am at my last gasp."

Lupo went out, and returned at once with the water. The wounded man gulped it down with avidity, and then said: "How little I thought what would happen tonight, when I drew this at the well, to wash away the blood after they had murdered you!"

Our Limontese saddled his horse, and got on it; then the host, seeing he was going away, gasped out the following words: "Another act of charity, as you are a Christian! do not leave me to die in mortal sin. At the end of the road you will see a church steeple; pray send me the priest."

Lupo assured him he would not fail to do so; and, as he passed the curate's house, he knocked at the door, and hearing a window opened, he called out: "The landlord wants you—make haste to him, and take the holy oil with you!"

"What is the matter? What has happened, my good man?" shouted the priest after him, but the rider went on at a sharp trot without paying any attention.

On he went quite alone; from time to time he stretched his numbed and battered limbs; and as he felt on different parts of his body, the smarts of many slight skin wounds inflicted by the sharp point of the stiletto penetrating between the rings of his mail armor, he said: "How lucky it was I put on my good steel coat."

By this time dawn was breaking, and some human beings began to appear on the road, and peasants with their tools on their backs on their way to reap. Lupo, cheered by the returning light of day, and the sight of the fields, and men and animals, soon began to forget the perils of the past night, and he was traveling on with all his thoughts turned to Marco, and to the distance he had yet to traverse before reaching him, when he heard a great disturbance in a vineyard. He saw a number of country folk pursuing a man on horseback, who was going at a furious pace across country. This was one of the worthies from the inn, the third who had escaped as by a miracle from our Limontese. The steed he was bestriding, a savage and uncontrollable stallion, had, as may be remembered, broken his halter, and now was careering desperately along, and the shouts of the pursuing peasants seemed only to increase his speed and fury. The man on his back stuck on like grim death, holding the mane, and crying out, "Help! help!" Lupo recognized him at once, and stopped to see how the matter would end.

The horse, at last, blinded by fright, came with a great shock against the trunk of a large tree, and both he and his rider rolled on the ground. The animal had his neck broken, but the rider was quite unhurt, and sprang to his feet as lightly as a cat; but while he was shaking off the earth and sand with which he was daubed, he raised his eyes, and saw Lupo, who, having followed the horse's course, had arrived at the scene of the disaster.

The man gave himself up for dead: he saw he had no chance of escaping on foot from one on horseback, and threw himself on his knees, begging for his life.

"Who are you, you scamp?" asked Lupo.

"Most noble sir," answered the poor wretch, shaking in every limb, "I am a poor devil: what I did, I did not do it out of treachery; it was only to get a little bread for my poor children, five little treasures I have at home; and Passerino led me into the scrape."

"But what was his quarrel with me?"

"I know nothing about it."

"What, can't you tell me anything?"

"No, I know nothing; you can kill me, but I have nothing to tell. He came last night to my house, and said, 'Come and earn a good florin,' but I know nothing else; and I do not even know who you are."

"Bravo! and you came off quietly to cut the throat of a perfect stranger?"

"You are quite right, and I only ask your mercy. You can do with me what you will, but I commend my children to you. You may believe me, that hunger drove me to it. In these times of scarcity, I could not see them die of starvation before my eyes."

Lupo drew out of his pocket a gold florin, and throwing it on the ground, said, "This is not for you, you rascal, but for your children, and remember, if I had caught you half an hour ago, these reasons would not have saved your life; now be off, and return thanks to your patron saint."

So saying, he shook his reins, and went on with his journey, experiencing no more adventures worthy of being recorded.

On his arrival at Lucca, he saw a number of people dispersed in the streets making a great noise, and guessed this must be a rising of the inhabitants. As he went on, the crowd increased, as also did the confusion and disorder. Weapons of different sorts and scaling-ladders were being brandished aloft; and at times, amid the deep and sinister murmur of an excited multitude, might be distinguished the ringing of a bell.

"What has happened here?" asked Lupo of a boy, whom he saw leaving a house, with a spit in his hand, and betaking himself into the thick of the mob.

"Don't you know?" was the reply, "they are going to lay siege to the palace of the government; all hands to work! we must finish up those renegades!" And so saying, he was off in a moment.

"Lay siege to the palace of the Signoria?" said Lupo to himself. "If I am not mistaken, that is what they told me at Milan, was Marco's abode." And with his mind all astir with this news, he went on a little, intending to find out more about the matter. But then he reflected that to ask so openly about Marco, in the midst of a crowd of people, who apparently were in open revolt against him, could do no good; so he retraced his steps to a hostelry which he remembered to have observed in passing.

On entering the house, he put up his horse in the stable, and then began, in a careless sort of way, to chatter a bit with the old landlady, who was the only person in the house—her husband and her two sons having gone out to join in the tumult; and, leading her on by degrees, he set her tongue wagging glibly, and got out of her everything he wanted to know.

The state of affairs was as follows: Marco had been at Florence for some days; meanwhile, one of the commanders of the German troops, who had been left as his lieutenant at Lucca, had given the rein to the soldiery, who, for some time past impatient of constraint, had now run riot over the town as if it were their own property, plundering, imposing taxes, satisfying their feelings of revenge—in a word, committing all sorts of atrocities; and the townspeople, already infuriated by the suspicion that Visconti was intriguing to sell Lucca to the Republic of Florence, had risen in insurrection.

Lupo, who, at the first idea that Marco was in danger, had decided on one of two courses—either to rescue him or to perish in his behalf—felt much relieved when he heard that he was well away from these troubles. As there was now nothing more for him to do in Lucca, he at once resumed his journey to endeavor to find him in Florence; for he well knew how important it was that Ermelinda's letter should reach its destination as soon as possible, as on this might depend the lives of three persons who, in their different ways, were all precious to him. So he got on his horse, and away he went.

CHAPTER XXIX

A MOTHER'S APPEAL

SINCE the last letter written by Marco to Lodrisio, which he received from Pelagrua at the castle of Rosate, affairs at Lucca had gone from bad to worse. The German troops, composed of adventurers, utterly regardless of discipline, could no longer be controlled by Visconti.

Marco, who had to contend every day with this disorderly rabble, owed the little hold over them he still possessed to the luster of his name, the dignity of his personal bearing, and to his readiness of speech. Time after time his presence had been sufficient to make these turbulent troops lay aside their arms, which they were on the point of imbruing in the blood of his subjects. Time after time he had ordered these very rebels to arrest their leaders, and such was the awe inspired by the dignified severity of his countenance, that they had not once ventured to disobey.

At the same time he saw plainly enough by how slight a thread he upheld an authority disputed at the very first, and which had no intrinsic strength of its own. His original title he could not alter, and whence was the intrinsic strength to come? It may be supposed it should have been sought for among the citizens themselves, who should have had the courage to unite, in order to shake off those fiends incarnate from their backs. But the difficulty lay with these very citizens, part of whom never had been able to look favorably on Marco, part had lost what little love they ever had for him, and the rest had conceived a violent hatred against him. But the main reason why he was so universally blamed was, that he had often winked at minor evils to avoid greater. For instance, he had more than once shut his eyes to abuses and encroachments on the part of those too-powerful troops, and had not been sufficiently careful to hold an even balance in regard to the daily squabbles between them and the townspeople, so as to maintain the right of the weak against the tyranny of the strong. Not that Marco really loved injustice; but his notions of justice were, like those of most soldiers, of a rough and ready kind, that did not stand much upon ceremony, and besides, he had to keep up his own position. The end of it all was, that Marco felt he could not depend upon the citizens to assist him in making head against the partisans of Ceruglio. Besides, these citizens were all unarmed, and ignorant of military discipline, and, what was worst of all, were at feud among themselves.

This insurrection was confined to one quarter of the town, the rest not responding to the summons; and the handful of wretches who were making such a disturbance at the time Lupo entered the city, before he had gone five or six miles on his journey, were all shut up in their houses, speechless with terror, except twenty or so of them, who were lying on the pavement of the squares and streets, pierced by German lances, or trodden to pieces by their horses' hoofs.

At last, finding himself reduced to such straits, and perceiving that things were growing worse every day, and that the government of Lucca was slipping from his grasp, Marco determined to get rid of it in good time, on the best terms he could. So, having come to an understanding with the leaders of the German troops, he entered upon secret negotiations with the Republic of Florence, which had been striving for some time past to obtain from him the cession of the city of Lucca. The preliminaries of the bargain were already far advanced, and only a few minor points remained to be settled, and this was the object, as was supposed, of Marco's visit to Florence.

The money that was to be paid for the proposed cession of Lucca was to be employed partly in making up their arrears to the German troops, and the rest Marco seems to have intended to use in taking those very troops into his own pay, and leading them into Lombardy, to assist in carrying out the plan he and Lodrisio had been maturing for a long time.

But things did not go altogether smoothly. On the contrary, Marco was full of bitterness, disgust, and misgivings, on account of the endless unforeseen difficulties arising on all sides, owing to old grudges and enmities which now came to be displayed against him. At one time he was irritated by the nonchalant sluggishness of some strong partisan, at another he suspected that some friend would betray him. To this was added a feeling of disgust, ill dissembled even from himself, and a secret shame at the bargain he was on the point of clenching; not to mention an incessant and excruciating undercurrent of remorse and passion which seemed to pervade his whole mind, and to mingle itself with every other feeling.

The day preceding that on which the treaty for the acquisition of Lucca was to be laid before the Florentine Council, Marco, who had received an intimation that the priors, and other rulers of the land, would hear what he had to say before they proceeded to a discussion, was alone in his apartment, and had just finished picking out of a bundle of papers the various treaties entered into, up to that day, between himself and the agents of the Republic, when a page entered to announce the arrival of a courier from Lombardy, who had passed through Lucca. "Let him come in at once," said Marco, thinking he was one of those despatched by Lodrisio every week.

The new arrival appeared. It was Lupo, who, nearly beside himself with joy and bewilderment at finding himself in the presence of this man, could not bring out a word, so merely took Ermelinda's letter from his bosom and presented it. Visconti put it down on a table without even glancing at the address, and asked, "Then you have come through Lucca?"

"Yes, I came across Lucca," answered Lupo, whose heart beat so fast that he could hardly speak, and he added, having to a degree recovered his breath: "and I left it in a great commotion."

"By this time the town is as quiet as a convent," returned Marco, who had received three or four expresses to keep him informed of the revolt during its entire progress. "But I hope you received no injury there."

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied the youth, encouraged by the kind manner in which this question was asked. "And if anyone—I am not inclined by nature to bear insults patiently; and when I was on my way to Marco, I should like to see the person who would dare to harm me."

On hearing this boast Visconti raised his eyes to the speaker's face, and then bestowing a kindly smile upon him, said, "You are not one of the usual messengers—you have been a soldier, have you not?"

"I am one now."

"You see, I guessed right! I know our craft by their looks; and you have a countenance that agrees with your words, and assures me you are an honest fellow."

Lupo blushed scarlet with the pleasurable excitement caused by these praises; and Marco, walking up to him, continued: "You are very young; tell me what actions you have taken part in?"

"The first action I was in was the one on the Adda; I fought there under your banner, and afterward"—

But Visconti, without letting him go on, took hold of his cheek between his fingers, and pinching it with military friendliness, said: "So you were one of those good blades who stuck so close to me through the year 'twenty-four. You learned your trade quickly. We must be old friends in that case."

When Visconti withdrew his hand, Lupo seized it and kissed it with the fervor of a devotee.

This warm and loyal impulse touched the heart of the generous leader; and he exclaimed, much moved: "My good Milanese forever!"

"Long live Marco! Long live our Captain!" cried Lupo. "Oh, when shall I see those days again, when I rushed to victory with your name on my lips!"

"Listen to me," said the Visconti, lowering his voice; "those days may return, and perhaps at no great distance of time. When you go back into Lombardy you will say to your valiant comrades: 'Marco's heart has always been with you, and you must trust in your old leader.' As to yourself, attend to me; at whatever time or place, or in whatever condition I may be in, the first time that you chance to see me, come to me with confidence; remember what I have now told you, and you shall not be the loser."

While the boy was pouring forth thanks and protestations, Marco cut his words short by saying: "Why did you not make yourself known to me before?" And then going to the table he took up a pen, and said: "Soldier, your name?"

"Lupo, from Limonta."

"Lupo? that name I have heard before, it is not altogether strange to me."

"That may be, for you once condescended to write it down with your own glorious hand on a sheet of paper, which saved my life."

Then Marco recalled the letter which, at Beatrice's entreaty, he had written to the Abbot of San Ambrogio, on that fatal night, which was indelibly inscribed in his memory. He remembered that the man for whom the favor had been asked was a squire of Ottorino's; so now he gazed with renewed attention on the face of the youth before him, and recognized him as the same who had served as squire to Ottorino on the day of the joust. Quite amazed at this discovery, he said to himself: "Why on earth did Lodrisio send me this man as a messenger —a retainer of his enemy?" and thought of questioning Lupo on the subject; but on second thought decided to examine instead the letter just arrived, in the belief that it was from Lodrisio, hoping to find in it the explanation of such a strange circumstance.

He took up the sheet of paper and opened it, and the first thing that surprised him was to see it was in ordinary writing, and not in cipher; then, struck by the first sentence, he ran over the paper with his eyes to discover the signature. Fearing that his excitement might betray him into some undignified action, he at once dismissed Lupo, who left him, wondering as to the cause of the sudden change he could not help remarking in the features and expression of the great man.

During the short time that Marco spent in locking the door, a hundred speculations filled his mind: "Is it possible that Beatrice has ceased to care for Ottorino—and would be willing—oh, I must be in my dotage to hope so! It is more likely to beg me to cease opposing this match. Perhaps it is to announce to me that she is already married, that all is over! It would be a crushing blow, and yet I feel that I could bear it—yes, bear it, and even offer these much-tried people every amends in my power, and oblige them to forgive me."

He sat down with the letter in his hand, and read:

"Marco:—A disconsolate mother throws herself at your feet, and conjures you, by all you hold sacred in heaven and earth, to give her back her only daughter, the supreme joy, the last comfort of her unhappy life. I know that the great ones of this earth are used to surround their lives with mystery, to conceal their actions, and, after committing an injustice, in order to appear irresponsible, to make a show of irritation with even the complaints of the victim who has suffered. But you—you will not refuse the prayers of a poor afflicted woman.

"Marco, my daughter has been stolen from me—for more than twenty days she has been in the power of others. Who can tell where she may be, or into whose hands she has fallen? It is to you that I confidently appeal to restore her at once unharmed to her desolate parents, to her husband, who has been betrayed and violently torn from her. It is her own mother who claims her from you, in the name of all who love her, in the name of God, I implore you, kneeling humbly before you, with my head in the dust, with my spirit dismayed and trembling, but inspired at the same time with the confidence that is given me by the certainty that my words are heard in heaven, and that even for the powerful there is a punishment in store.

"Oh, Marco, forgive me! I will but weep and pray—all my words shall be lowly and humble—forgive a poor mother who is made frantic by excess of grief. Oh, if I knew how to touch your heart! See, I have already told you she is the wife of Ottorino. Yes, he has put the ring on her finger; their union is blessed before God. I was foremost in hastening this marriage, and must I own why? Can I without confusion, without shame?

"I swear to you that I wished your welfare in this, that I felt sure it was the only means of diverting your mind from an ill-omened house, out of which nothing but disasters have ever come upon you. Because, you see, if even—if ever I could have forgotten myself so much as to give my daughter for your bride, Beatrice never could have been yours, for her young heart was already bestowed on another. Marco! I knew you well formerly, and I know that you would not then have desired a body without a soul; that you could not have found your happiness in the misery of the lady of your love. Now, tell me if Beatrice's mother has been mistaken in judging of you as Ermelinda once judged.

"Do you still remember that unhappy name? It is all that is left to me of what I was—time and grief have destroyed the rest. You—how much glory you have won! Powerful, revered, and dreaded by your enemies! The pride and the idol of Lombardy! But I—I have nothing but my daughter, that sweet and cherished treasure of my life; my only comfort and hope; all my pride is centered in her alone. Ah! by your courtesy—by your world-wide fame—by what passed once between us—if I was ever beloved by you, deliver me from this agony; restore my daughter to me; restore her now, before grief has closed forever these eyes weary of weeping. Oh, if you knew the anguish of my days! If you could experience the horrors of one single hour of my long nights, haunted by ghostly fears! If you knew what it is to be a mother! My life, as you know, has always been thickly sown with sorrows; but all the past is a shadow, a dream, to the torment and agony which this mortal blow causes me. No! I did not believe it was possible to suffer so much in this world. O God! merciful God! Thy hand is laid too heavily on a feeble human being; cease this chastening which I can no longer support; take me into Thy good keeping, but first save my daughter! Alas! tears cloud my vision, my hand shakes; I feel I can do no more. Marco! would I were able to fall at your feet and expire there, while asking with my last voice that favor which you could not deny to a dying soul!

"Have pity on the miserable "ERMELINDA."

CHAPTER XXX

THE SEARCH

THIS letter sent a dagger through Marco's heart; he was eager to mount at once and ride to Milan, and was with difficulty restrained by remembrance of the affairs of Lucca, and the treaty that was to be settled the next day. He spent all that night as if lying on thorns, tortured by a frantic impatience that nearly drove him mad.

At last it was day; the appointed hour struck, and he presented himself before the Priors; his face was haggard; he spoke but little, and was impatient of the slightest contradiction; he disputed everything that was said or done, and seemed as if he wanted to pick a quarrel with everybody. In short, he so overstepped the boundaries of discretion and common civility, that the small minority who had always been against the purchase had no difficulty now in bringing over the majority to their side. It was, therefore, decided to give up Lucca altogether, and break off at once all negotiations relating thereto. Marco, who had withdrawn from the Council Chamber during these deliberations, no sooner heard what had been decided upon, than, without saying a word to the German leaders, he returned to his palace, and, accompanied by Lupo and two attendants, mounted his horse, and set off on his return to Lombardy.

He traveled night and day, and on the way he made Lupo tell him all he knew about Beatrice and his master Ottorino.

Ermelinda had gone into no particulars, as she felt sure that Marco held the threads of the whole plot in his hands, and therefore supposed that he must know far more about the affair than she could have told him in the compass of a letter.

Visconti, however, being quite in the dark about it all, on hearing now for the first time of the disappearance of Beatrice and her maid, of the trap in which the speaker himself had been caught, together with his master, and of the danger he had since run, on his journey to Lucca, and on thinking over the events of the past year, could not help remembering what mortal aversion Lodrisio had always shown toward Ottorino. He then remembered a certain offer that had been made to him through Pelagrua to rid him of that young knight, and of certain malicious expressions and insinuations directed against him either by Pelagrua himself or by some agent in his behalf, and on comparing the dates, the event itself, and the character of the parties, he found such a remarkable coincidence that he felt persuaded that the whole assassination scheme had been concocted by those two dissemblers, who had been for some time, to his certain knowledge, on the most intimate terms with each other. Having arrived at this conclusion, he felt the blood boil in his veins, and his cheeks flush scarlet; he swore in his rage to revenge himself on those traitors for seeking to bring such infamy on his head; and to punish them for the agony they had caused the poor mother and her unfortunate daughter, and indeed not to rest so long as either of those rascals still lived.

Arriving at Milan at last, he and Lupo made their way to the house of Count del Balzo, determined by some means to have an interview with Ermelinda, and to find out all she knew of the whereabouts of the missing pair, with a view to taking immediate steps for their rescue. He wished at the same time to clear himself to her of the charge of being concerned in such a piece of treachery; for he could not endure the notion of being branded with such infamy in the mind of the woman whom he formerly loved more than life itself, and still reverenced more than any other being in the world.

It was midnight when Lupo knocked at the door of the Count's palace, and Marco drew down his visor, to avoid being recognized by the lackeys. A deep silence reigned in the house, and Lupo guided Visconti through a succession of apartments into a little out-of-the-way room, where he left him with a lighted candle, saying he was going to awaken one of Ermelinda's servants, to bid her inform her mistress of Marco's arrival.

Marco then unfastened his helmet, laid it on the table, and threw himself into an armchair to await Ermelinda's coming. He had not seen her for five-and-twenty years. How their respective circumstances had changed in that time! How different was she whom he then left from her whom now he was to see! How could he sustain her looks, certain as she was to taunt him with having caused her father's death, and her own present misery, after the love she had lavished upon him.

He had not long to wait; he suddenly saw a door in front of him open very gently, and a lady glide in, clad in a loose white robe, with her hair in a partly disheveled state. Her face was tinged with a slight flush, which clearly had been called forth by some extraordinary agitation. Her eyes, swelled and reddened by her long vigils and weeping, glistened with a slight ray of hope, mingled, however, with an ill-concealed look of apprehension.

Visconti at first hardly recognized Ermelinda, so sadly had age and suffering altered her from what she once was; but, however much he might feel certain from seeing her in that place, and in such distress, that she could be none other than the mother of Beatrice, yet he could not bring himself to address her, and remained for a moment in suspense; when the lady, coming close up to him, exclaimed, "Is it you?"

It was the same sweet accent, the same celestial harmony that he had so often listened to in his youth. He jumped up as if he were giddy, fixed his eyes on the lady's countenance, and in that first moment of frenzy, almost hoping still to find in her the beauty and that enchanting ray of love that was the light of his life for so many years, and the memory of which alone in his maturer years had produced his mad love for Beatrice; but soon recovering himself, he cast down his eyes, and remained standing without speaking.

"And is it you?" said Ermelinda in a sweet though melancholy tone; "and have you come in person to restore me to life? The Lord will reward you for this act of mercy. I have been telling myself that when Marco is fully aware of the grief he has caused, he is too good and generous not to endeavor to undo it."

Marco, on hearing these words, was seized with so much tender pity for the unfortunate lady, and by such wrath against himself that he could not restrain a gesture of annoyance, which at first greatly alarmed his companion.

"Do you call me good and generous?" he said in a half-stifled voice. "Ermelinda, cease such cruel satire. I am in truth a miserable wretch, but I have not so entirely hardened my heart as not to know my own sins, and to feel a comfort in confessing them, and in confessing them to you in particular."

"No, do not speak in this way. God will pardon you—I have already forgiven you. The consolation you now afford me makes up to me for the anguish I have endured. Now, tell me, where is my daughter? When shall I see her again?"

"Have you not had any clue to her whereabouts from the jester, who was on her track?" asked Marco anxiously.

At these words the lady changed countenance; a sudden cloud darkened her brow, which had begun to wear an air of hope. She looked at Visconti, and replied with hesitation, "The jester, you say?—no, he has never appeared again, and I begin to be afraid. But you—why do you ask me?"—and she stopped short.

"I see, Ermelinda," pursued Visconti, "that you think it is I who am the cause of Beatrice's disappearance; but this is not the case. You must know"—

"Oh, my God! where is she then? Forgive me, Marco; it is not that I doubt your word, but did you not almost own to me this deed yourself, just now? And, you see, I have already known for some time your feelings toward my child."

"Listen to me," said Visconti, bending down his head, in the attitude of a man conscious of guilt, and beginning his speech in a slow, faint voice, which became agitated and excited as he went on. "Listen to me, Ermelinda. It is true that I did love your daughter—I loved her with an overwhelming love. It was the impress of your image in her face, it was your soul that I fancied was transfused into hers, which fascinated me, and took away my senses. If I had only been able to lay a crown at her feet! to make her my wife and my queen! There was one moment when I tasted the divine sweetness of hope, and that moment was my destruction; an insidious poison ran through my veins, and filled my whole being. When I felt certain that the maiden had already listened to the vows of another, it was too late, the wound had become incurable. I will not describe to you the long and intricate path of suffering by which I was urged at last to plan the death of my faithful follower, my dearest and most generous relative. I tremble even now when I think I was so near to imbruing in his blood this very hand, which he had pressed so often with the tender and respectful affection of a son."

"Are you speaking of Ottorino?"

"Yes, the unknown knight who fought with him to the death on the day of the joust, was that madman who stands before you."

The lady raised her eyes compassionately to Visconti's face, and apparently was on the point of saying something; but he continued in the heat of an ever-growing remorse:

"No, you must first hear the whole story, you must know that at that time I was obliged to leave these parts: when I went, I left behind an iniquitous command. I left strict orders with a low ruffian to put a stop to the marriage between the young man and your daughter; my gold, in the hands of that wretch, bribed a treacherous servant of your own. I repeat to you, Ermelinda, I did not order the abduction of Beatrice, and I had not the remotest idea of such a project, but the villain on whom I imposed that infamous duty may have had the courage to imagine this enormity; in any case, I am an impious wretch."

"No, no, Marco! for my sake cease this language; you are accusing yourself too heavily, for he cannot be altogether impious who feels so repentant for his fault. Stormy passions may have driven you out of the right path, but your heart, I feel sure, was never really perverted."

"Oh, my consoling angel!"—broke in Marco, "your words are a true balsam to me, Ermelinda! If you had been always at my side, my beacon and tender companion in the hard and stormy path of life, my days would have been calm and innocent, filled with the holy joys of a husband and father; and, when declining age arrives, the past would not be so heavy and sad with troublous recollections. You do not think me altogether bad! I thank you, Ermelinda; as you tell me so, I will believe also that I could not have entirely corrupted a heart which once burned with the fire lighted by your angelic character, by your immortal virtues. Yes, Ermelinda, I will believe, on your assurance, that I am yet more unhappy than criminal."

The lady hid her face in her hands, and wept.

"I am now here entirely for your sake," continued Marco, with increasing agitation; "to see whether my blood can make amends, for I am ready and willing to shed it to the last drop. I will search for Beatrice to restore her to you, to make her happy in her wished-for nuptials. I will find Ottorino also, and it behooves me to trace him out, and to give him back myself the bride whose possession I have disputed with him. I shall have not a moment's peace till I see you all happy again, and till I have cleared up this mystery of iniquity."

At this point he stopped for a moment and fixed his eyes on Ermelinda, who had never ceased weeping; and then pressing his clenched hands together, he continued with violence: "And let the villains tremble who have to answer to me for having caused so many tears. Woe, woe to them all! Farewell!"

"Farewell," replied Ermelinda; "may God be with you now and ever, and may He show mercy to us all."

Visconti, as he went out, found Lupo waiting for him under the portico, and said to him, "Come with me to Rosate."

The Limontese, having expressed his gratitude for the invitation by a respectful bow, followed him without a word. Having arrived at Marco's house, they mounted their horses and galloped off to Rosate.

But another man, unknown to them, was galloping a little in advance of them on the same road; this was a courier sent off at full speed to Pelagrua by Lodrisio, who had suddenly heard of the arrival of Marco at Milan.

Our two travelers arrived before the walls of the Castle of Rosate about daybreak. Marco gave the accustomed signal, when the drawbridge was lowered, the gates thrown open, and he passed with Lupo beneath the barbican; but neither there, nor in the courtyard beyond, was a living soul to be seen.

The porter, soon recognizing the lord of the castle, was running off to ring a bell to announce his arrival, but was stopped by a sign from him, and was at once questioned about Pelagrua.

"He went out this very night," replied the porter, "and he has not yet returned; but," he added, "a courier from Milan arrived an hour ago with a letter for him, which was understood to be of urgent importance."

"Where is the courier?"

"In my lodge here, and swearing like a heretic at the delay."

"Send him at once to me, in the red room. If Pelagrua should return in the mean time, let him in, but let no one go out afterward without my orders. Do you understand?"

"Sir, your commands shall be obeyed to the letter."

Marco, crossing a large courtyard, went into the room he had pointed out, in order to wait for the courier. A few minutes afterward the man appeared, and Marco, meeting him, grasped him by the arm, and said, "Hand me that letter."

The worthy man, who in the dim light of the chamber did not recognize at first who it was who was speaking to him and treating him in that fashion, struggled to free his arm from Marco's clutch, and having at last extricated himself, answered, "My orders are not to give it up except into the seneschal's own hands."

Visconti, however, grasping him again still more firmly, drew him near a window, and replied with a terrible voice, "Hand me that letter."

By the light that came from the window, the poor man recognized the features of the famous captain, and with pale face and trembling voice, he replied, "Forgive me, I did not know you. My master certainly—but you, you are the master—here is the letter," and he drew it from his breast, and gave it to him.

Marco opened it, and glancing eagerly over it, saw that it had no signature. He then read the contents, which were as follows:

"You unhanged scoundrel—by this time you ought to have done the deed as we arranged. Deuce take you for having delayed so long. A pretty mess you have got into, now that Marco is in Milan. Yes, I can tell you he arrived here to-night, and to-morrow he will be down upon you. Look sharp, you scoundrel. I hope this letter will put you on your mettle. Destroy every trace of the deed—remove every proof of it—look out in all directions; remember, you wretch, that your life depends on it.

Visconti was struck with horror. His hair stood on end, and a cold shudder ran through his veins. He went up to the courier and shaking his fist in his face, shouted, "Who gave you this letter?"

The question was spoken in a voice that admitted of no hesitating answer. The man replied at once, "I had it from Lodrisio."

"If you wish to leave this place alive," continued Marco, "tell me what sort of dealings has he with my seneschal?"

But the other, half stupefied by fear, looked at his questioner's face with staring eyes, and answered not a word.

"Do you know?" inquired Marco, in a still louder voice, "do you know anything of the contents of the letter which you have brought here?"

The courier in his fright and bewilderment could not utter a word.

"Do you know, you cowardly rogue?" cried the lord of the castle furiously, shaking him violently by the shoulder.

"Mercy, mercy!" he replied at last, as if waking up from his stupor of alarm; "I know nothing. I have simply obeyed my master, who said to me, 'Carry this letter to Pelagrua,' and I have brought it. As for the rest, I swear to you on the faith of a Christian, that I am perfectly ignorant. You may kill me, but you will get nothing out of me, for I know nothing."

"I will speak to you again presently. In the mean time beware of quitting this room for a moment."

Marco hastened to the seneschal's quarters, knocked, and on a maid-servant opening the door, told her that he wished to speak at once to Pelagrua's wife.

The maid, without knowing who he was, introduced him into a room, where, in a few moments, the seneschal's wife joined him with a child in her arms.

"Where is your husband?" asked Visconti in a stern voice.

The poor woman, alarmed at so suddenly finding herself in her master's presence, and at hearing herself questioned in this manner, stepped back, clasping the infant to her bosom, and replied, stammering, "He went out last night, but I do not know where."

"Read this letter," said Marco, giving her Lodrisio's missive, "and explain to me at once the mystery it implies."

The woman glanced over the fatal paper in fear and trembling, then falling on her knees before her lord, said, amid a torrent of tears, "Oh, have pity on my wretched husband!"

"Quick, tell me, what do those words mean," interrupted Marco.

"I will tell you all I know."

"Get up and speak at once."

The poor frightened creature rose to her feet, and sobbing and shaking, began: "I told him so often; I begged and entreated him. God will bear me witness"—

"I ask about Beatrice!" broke in Marco between his set teeth. "Tell me of her; is she still alive?"

"She is alive; she has been here more than a month," replied the woman.

"Alive and here?" repeated Visconti, breathing again.

"Yes," continued the seneschal's wife, "yesterday before dark I saw her attendant at a window, from which she often used to let me know by signs how things went on, and what her mistress was in need of; she let me know she was fairly calm; the poor thing has been ill for a time."

"Quick! take me to her directly, I must see her this moment, I tell you."

The woman put her infant into the arms of the handmaid, and said to Marco, "Come with me."

They went down a staircase, turned to the left under the portico, from that they entered a courtyard, which they crossed, and found themselves in a long dark passage, whence, after many turnings and windings, they finally came out in another small and solitary court, where the woman, raising her hand toward some windows far up in an opposite wall, said, "She is there, in company with her faithful waiting-maid."

"We must go up immediately," said Marco, and was putting his foot on the first step of a staircase which led up to the room; but suddenly stopping, he said: "No, you shall go up alone, I will stay here; for the sight of a man—the sight of me—cheer her up, tell her to be of good courage, that she will see her mother very soon—and return home. Tell her that I—no, no, do not speak of me, do not mention my name; tell her everything to make her happy, and promise everything she wishes."

"But you have really and truly come to deliver her?" asked the seneschal's wife timidly—"for I could not have the heart to betray the poor creature."

"Let me die excommunicated, and let my body lie in unconsecrated ground, if I do not speak the truth."

"Then God bless you!" exclaimed the woman, clasping her hands.

"And now," continued Visconti, "in order to gain time, while you are breaking the good news to her, I will go at once and despatch a messenger to her parents, who will be here very soon." Upon this, he retraced his steps into the principal courtyard, where he found Lupo, and charged him to take the best horse out of the stables, and repair to Milan with what haste he could, to announce to the Count and Countess del Balzo that their daughter was discovered, and to beg them to come immediately to Rosate to see her, and take her home.

Pelagrua's wife went up the staircase, and into a gallery, which was the entrance into Beatrice's apartments, and knocked lightly, speaking at the same time. No one answered; she put her ear to the keyhole, and did not hear a sound in the room; she knocked louder, called Lauretta, called Beatrice; nobody replied; she went to a large window, defended by an iron grating which looked into the second room, rapped with her fingers against the glass, looked in, called the maid and the mistress again, but with no result; she now returned to the door, knocked, shook it, battered it; but all was in vain.

The poor thing felt a deathly chill come over her. What could have happened to the prisoners? She thought of Lodrisio's letter, and shuddered. She thought of Marco, and would have preferred to fall dead on the spot rather than appear before him with this news. What was she to do? Hide herself? Escape? but where, and how? She raised her eyes to heaven, ejaculated: "Lord! I am in Thy hands;" and then she betook herself to the room where she knew Marco was usually to be found when he came to the castle.

She had just entered the anteroom, when she saw him coming from the portico, returning from having despatched Lupo to Milan. He hastened to join her, and as soon as he was near enough to be heard, without speaking too loud, "Well," he asked, anxiously, "have you comforted her? Did you tell her her mother would be here in a few hours? How is she? What did she say?"

The woman covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

"Oh, my God!" cried Marco, his expression changing suddenly from tender anxiety to fear and horror. "What has happened? Tell me this moment—tell me for your life's sake."

"She is not to be found," answered the seneschal's wife, in a half stifled voice; "there is no one at all in her rooms."

"Wretches that you are! Infamous traitors, the whole set of you!" Marco cried out, like a madman. "But, thank God, you are in my power! Villains, yes, you are in my power, and blood shall be redeemed by blood."

While he spoke he struck his forehead with one hand, and with the other grasped as in a vise that of the woman, who, thinking her last hour on earth was come, raised her eyes to heaven with a look of such timid piety that even a harder heart would have been moved to compassion.

Visconti was touched, let go her hand, and looked her in the face, while she, lifting up to heaven the hand which still bore the marks of his iron pressure, said, still weeping: "God is my witness; I am innocent!"

"And I believe you," said Marco; "good woman, take courage, you have nothing more to fear from me." But seeing that she continued to weep, he resumed in a more decided and impatient manner: "Be comforted, I say, and tell me quietly all you know."

The woman, somewhat cheered, but still frightened, told of the door which she had found closed, and how she had knocked and called in vain outside. Visconti felt a slight hope that Beatrice might still be in her rooms, and that for some good reason she would neither open the door nor answer. He then remembered the other secret door which opened into the same apartment, the very one by which Lodrisio and Pelagrua had entered some days before, to the great consternation of the poor prisoners. He therefore proposed to the seneschal's wife to let her in on that side, and took her there himself by roundabout and secret passages, and telling her he would wait for her outside, pulled a cord connected with some springs that disclosed the door.

The woman entered, and pushing back the panel, so as to conceal Marco from any person inside, cast her eyes round the room, which was Beatrice's sleeping-room, but saw no one; then she passed through three or four more in succession, calling out and inquiring as she went, but with no better success.

In a few minutes the woman returned to the door behind which she had left Marco, and said in a low voice, "There is no one."

He now came forward, and looked round the room. Every moment he thought he heard Beatrice sigh, and the faint sounds of her voice seemed to appeal to him for pity and assistance.

Near the partition where the door opened was a splendid bed with embroidered curtains, which had not been slept in. Beatrice had never dared to get into bed or lie down, ever since she discovered she was no longer secure, even in the privacy of her apartments, but had spent each night, ill as she was, without taking off her clothes, reclining in an armchair, leaning her feeble frame against the bed, and languidly supporting her head on her elbow.

On a small table, in the center of the room, was a lamp still alight, but which, its oil being almost spent, only sent up a thin thread of flame along a wick all but reduced to a white ash. Marco fixed his eyes upon it, and in that moment of excitement imagined that that slender flame was a symbol of Beatrice's life.

Near the lamp lay a Bible open at the thirty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah; the leaves seemed bathed with fresh tears, and at the third, fourth, and fifth verses, the following words had been underscored: *And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand . . . . . yet hear the word of the Lord. . . . . Thus saith the Lord of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace . . . . and they will lament thee, saying, Ah Lord!*

Marco, on reading this, seemed to feel an almost supernatural certainty that he should find the unhappy maiden still alive. He turned to the woman and said, "Be of good cheer, for I am sure Beatrice is not dead."

The wife of the seneschal followed him into the second room, which he entered still pursuing his researches. Here they found evident marks of violence and of desperate resistance. They saw a small table overturned, and fragments of vases and cups on the floor that must have been upon it. The bed was all in confusion, the bedclothes pulled off and thrown on the floor; one of the curtains was torn from top to bottom; the head of the bed was wrenched from the wall and twisted on one side; and they saw that the maid, in resisting her assailants, had clung to one of the pillars of the tester and had been torn from it by main force.

Marco, having observed all in silence, passed through a third and fourth apartment, till he came to the door opening into the corridor, shook it, and finding it was barred on the inside, inferred that the prisoners had not been carried off through it, but through the secret door mentioned above; so he and his companion retraced their steps through the rooms, and went out by the same way through which they had come in. It so happened, however, that in a certain dark passage the woman's foot came in contact with a soft flimsy substance, which, on bringing it to the light, she saw was a veil, all rumpled and crushed; this was a fresh argument in favor of Visconti's opinion that the girl had passed in that direction.

This passage, after conducting them through other long and tortuous corridors, came out at last, after endless windings, into an unused little court full of nettles and weeds, which was reached by a corkscrew staircase. In this courtyard there were two doors. One, opening into a vaulted passage, which crossed an immense glacis and a thick wall, and then led to the outside of the castle under a portcullis and over a drawbridge of its own, was a postern gate; the other was farther down, made of iron, closed with heavy bolts, and almost concealed between two enormous barbicans built of stone. This opened upon the interior of the fortress, and gave access to an infinity of subterranean passages, underground rooms and casemates, through an endless labyrinth of intricate lanes and passages, winding in a hundred directions, and burrowing through the whole basement of the enormous edifice.

Marco, having sent for the feudal judge of his seigneury, who acted in his name in the castle and its dependencies, ordered him to interrogate a family who lived in one of the bastions not far from the courtyard. He learned that one night they had heard stifled cries and groans. Not being able to make out whether the prisoners had been carried through the postern or concealed in the basement of the castle, Marco ordered the doors of the subterranean passages to be forced, as the keys were not forthcoming, and at the same time he sent out some discreet persons to scour the country and get what information they could, with directions not to make Pelagrua suspect they were in search of him, but, if they should find him, to bring him back to the castle, if necessary, by force.

The men that were ordered to search the interior of the castle, after breaking down the door with crowbars, found themselves in a dark passage, whence they went off in different directions. Each party, however, met with new obstacles at every step. The entrance to every corridor was closed with thick iron bars, and every room on either side was blocked with massive furniture and heavy iron chests. Marco himself flew here and there, inspiriting the workers, and lending a hand at smashing doors and breaking iron hinges and bars—but all in vain. After forcing their way through passage after passage, door after door, and searching endless empty rooms, they still found endless passages to be traversed, endless rooms to be searched.

CHAPTER XXXI

TOO LATE!

THIS tedious labor having gone on for several hours one of the men thought he heard a distant voice, as if from underground. Marco at once ordered everyone to be silent, and they listened with all their ears. A moment later the voice was heard again; it was a prolonged, shrill cry, as of grief, which seemed to come from a vault beneath the basement of one of the towers. All immediately set to work again, spurred by these fresh hopes. In an instant a barrier was broken down, and a door beaten in. Marco went in first to a small room with a taper in his hand, lifted a trap-door, and went down a winding staircase to the bottom of the tower in question. He was going forward in fear and trembling through a large dungeon, when he heard a voice asking for mercy, and discerned in a corner, close to the wall before him, something like a ghost stretching out its arms toward him. On hastening in that direction he distinguished an unknown face, by the light of the lamp he bore.

"It is certainly not Beatrice, it's a man," he cried. It was no other than Tremacoldo.

The jester soon told them who he was, and how, having ventured into the castle to find out whether Count del Balzo's daughter was concealed there, he had been caught and thrown into that dungeon, whence he never expected to come out alive. But he had no news to tell about Beatrice.

The bonds were broken and the prisoner was soon set at liberty, and Marco, more discouraged than ever, gave orders for the search to continue. After a time a squire appeared, to announce the arrival at the castle of the Count and Countess del Balzo, who were asking eagerly for the master. On hearing this, Marco grew pale, took a few steps toward the door, as if on his way to meet his newly arrived guests, then turned back, and with his head sunk on his breast, he remained for some time leaning against a pillar without moving or speaking.

At last, from a spot at some distance from the place where Marco was standing, a cry was raised by many voices: "She is here! she is found!" All, flinging down their tools, responded with another joyful cry, and rushed in that direction. The light of waving torches illuminated the dark, vaulted roof of the intricate labyrinth.

"Is she alive?" Marco's voice was heard asking, in the middle of the excited crowd.

"She is dead," replied a voice from the place to which all were hastening.

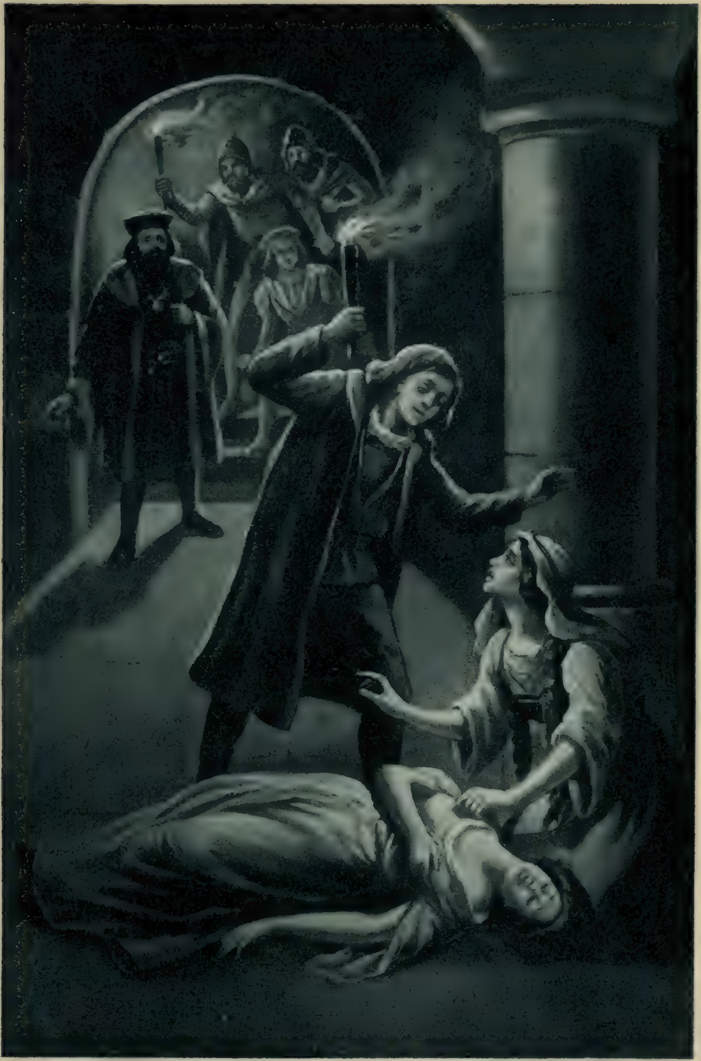
And then a group of persons was seen coming forward; in the center were two squires carrying reverently in their arms the Count's daughter, whose face was ashy white, her eyes shut, and her head hanging over one shoulder. Lauretta followed her, all disheveled, supporting her mistress's head, continually kissing her and bathing her with her tears.

Marco, in whose heart these varying cries of hope and despair were still resounding, when he saw this funereal procession advancing slowly, and by the light of the torches recognized the lovely form and white face of their youthful burden, could not believe it was a real spectacle. In order to make sure that he was awake, he stretched out his hands and felt the walls, and the persons of those who passed him; at last, cleaving the crowd, who made way for him, he approached Beatrice, and laid his hand on her brow.

The cold thrill that touch sent through him roused

A CRY WAS RAISED BY MANY VOICES:
"SHE IS HERE! SHE IS FOUND!"

From an Original Drawing by Joseph A. Espelt



him from his state of stupefaction. His limbs trembled, the blood rushed to his face and swelled the veins of his forehead.

He thus reached the top of the stairs, side by side with the unhappy maiden, and emerged into the small courtyard. Here the freshness of the open air and the sight of the sun seemed to turn the current of his thoughts. He remembered Ermelinda, who was expecting him; he felt she would die of fright and grief were she to see her daughter in that plight too suddenly, and this idea at once brought back his accustomed vigor of mind. He made signs to his attendants to stop, and with a firm voice and so composed a manner as surprised them all, he ordered the lights to be extinguished, the crowd to disperse without noise, and silence to be observed as to what they had seen below, while he himself preceded Lauretta and the bearers of Beatrice into the apartments of the warder's wife.

Having placed Beatrice on a bed, Marco asked her maid when her mistress expired.

"She was alive a very little while ago," replied Lauretta, in a voice broken with sobs, "and she died of fright in my arms when she heard the prison door broken in, and we thought they had come to murder us."

Meanwhile the castle leech, who had been immediately summoned, arrived; he examined the prostrate form, and held a candle to her lips, and thought he could perceive the flame was stirred by a very slight breath. By degrees the heart began to beat and the pulse could be felt, and the limbs recovered a portion of vital warmth. But her strength had been consumed by a long course of suffering, both of mind and body, and she was now in a burning fever. Would she live to see the morrow?

Marco, who had been almost beside himself at the unexpected joy of finding that she was still alive, now drooped his head in despair, and said to himself, "Here is the fulfilment of the prophet's words," and then with the air of one who has nothing more to hope or fear in this world, approached the wife of Pelagrua, and questioned her about Ottorino.

The woman who, from certain expressions let drop by Lodrisio in her presence, suspected that Beatrice's husband was shut up in the castle of Binasco, communicated her suspicions to Marco, who at once determined to put himself on Ottorino's track. So he left the sick girl's chamber, thinking that it would be better for her to be left alone with her maid, so that as soon as she recovered her senses, which were now fast returning, she might first rest her eyes on none other but that beloved and faithful countenance.

"Now go and call Beatrice's mother," he then said to the seneschal's wife; "bid her pray, and pray for me."

He hurried out of the courtyard, left some orders with the judge of the locality, and rode across the drawbridge, which was immediately raised behind him.

The sun, which was now high, poured its rays in through a window opposite the bed where Beatrice lay and threw a bright glow over her face, which rendered its deathly pallor more apparent. On first coming to herself the young girl opened her eyes and immediately closed them again, raising her hand to keep the light from her face, as it caused her much discomfort, from the long hours she had spent in the dungeon.

The damsel closed the shutters immediately, and then returned to her seat by her mistress's side, and embraced her, weeping. She seemed to hear those sobs and recognize this voice, and opening her eyes again she gazed on the girl for some time as if bewildered, and then said, "Is it you, Lauretta?"

"Yes, it is I. Don't be afraid any more; we are free. Be of good cheer."

But Beatrice, who did not take in the sense of these words, asked timidly, "Where have those wretches gone? Have they yet broken into the prison? I heard their shouts, and felt the blows of their daggers. Oh, tell me, they have not killed me yet? I thought I was dead, and they were carrying me to be buried among so many people and in a blaze of torchlight. It was night, and now it is day again all at once. Where are we now?"

"We are in the apartments of our good friend here, the seneschal's wife! but I tell you we are free, and it was Marco himself who came"—

The mention of that terrible name was like the touch of burning iron to rouse a fainting person. Beatrice struggled to sit up in bed, and said, "Oh, let us escape! hide me, save me, for mercy's sake!"

"Oh, no! try to be calm. Marco is not here, and you may be sure that no one shall enter this room but those you wish. We are free, I say again, and do you know the good news I have to tell you? Your mother has arrived."

"My mother?"

"Yes, your mother, and as soon as you are recovered sufficiently to bear the journey, we shall return home with her."

"Oh! you are not deceiving me again! Don't you remember how often you have told me that she would come? and then"—

"But now she is here, I tell you she is here, and you will see her directly."

"No, dear girl, your kindness is cruel; no, I shall never see her again. I have prayed God so often for this favor, with so many tears and such earnestness! He has never been willing to hear me, and now it would be too late."

"Oh, my child!" cried Ermelinda at this moment. She had been detained in the next room by the doctor, for fear of the first shock of joy having too great an effect on the weakened strength of the invalid; but she had heard every word, and, being no longer able to restrain her loving impulses, now threw herself into her daughter's arms.

Beatrice leaned her head on her mother's shoulder, and thus they remained pressed to each other for a long time in silence.

Ermelinda was the first to withdraw from that embrace; and laying her hand gently on her child's head, she said to her: "Now you must rest—you see, I am with you, never to leave you again; we will be always together, always, always; my poor, precious Beatrice! All your troubles are at an end; you must only think now of happiness, think of your mother, who is with you, and who never will leave your side."

Beatrice obeyed, and laid her head for a moment on the pillows; but then, unable to control herself, she raised it quickly, and lifting up her arms again, she entwined them round her mother's neck; and as the lady gently resisted, making a sign to her in some alarm to desist, the daughter said: "No, let me satisfy the longing of so many sorrowful days and nights; let me enjoy this consolation, let me forget myself in a delight which may be the last of my life."

"I implore you to be calm; so much emotion—so weak as you are"—

"Oh, no," replied Beatrice; "believe me, nothing but good can come of it; it soothes me to be with you;" and pressing her, and kissing her face, and bathing it with hot tears, she did nothing but repeat, with loving murmurs: "Oh, my mother! my dear mother!"

Ermelinda, overcome by those feelings which overrule everything, let herself be wrapped in her daughter's arms, and weeping also herself, gave her back, tenderly, the kisses and caresses she received from her.

"Do you know that your father is here also?" said Ermelinda, when she was calm enough to be able to speak.

"Why does he not come in?" asked the girl, her face lighted with a happy smile at the prospect of a new joy.

The Count was summoned, and he entered with mingled feelings of love and fear. But when he saw his daughter, so emaciated and weakened, take one arm from her mother's neck and extend it affectionately toward him, his fears were conquered by his love, and no other feelings than those of a father remained in him. He ran to her, and embracing her, said tenderly: "You are ill, my child."

"Oh, no! now that I am with my dear parents, I am well, only too well—but Ottorino?"

The Count screwed up his lips, as if he were taking a bitter medicine, and could not prevent himself from letting these words escape him: "Oh, for God's sake, don't speak about him here in this place!"

"Is he not my husband?" returned the girl, with a gesture that showed somewhat of resentment; then turning to her mother with increased tenderness, she said: "Is he alive? can I hope to see him?"

"Oh, yes! God has preserved him to us," answered Ermelinda. "From what the seneschal's wife tells me, he must be at Binasco; and Marco himself has gone from here to seek for him, and bring him here as soon as he has found him."

"Marco!" exclaimed with one voice both father and daughter, both startled by surprise and terror, though from different causes.

"Yes, Marco Visconti," repeated the lady; and then she began to give an account of the interview she had had with him the night before; she exonerated Visconti from every fault of which he appeared to be guilty; she spoke of the intense grief he felt for his previous share in the plot against the marriage. She told of his resolution to make amends, even at the cost of his own life; she described his increased friendliness toward Ottorino, and did not even refrain from owning his love to Beatrice, now that that love, purified by remorse and repentance, had changed into an anxious desire for her welfare, and last of all she spoke not so much in commendation as in extenuation of the man, in order to remove any shade of suspicion, every trace of rancor, in the mind of her husband as well as in that of her daughter.

The latter, who had begun to listen with tremulous anxiety, raised her eyes to heaven at the end of her mother's speech, and clasping her hands together, exclaimed, "May God forgive him!" Then turning again to her mother, she said, "Did you tell me that he has gone to seek for Ottorino? Do you really believe that my husband will arrive here in time to see me?"

"Oh, do not speak in that way, my child," exclaimed Ermelinda, in a tenderly reproachful voice, "my dearest, life and death are in the hands of a merciful God—He will not allow—in pity to us"— and then she was silent.

Beatrice took her mother's hand and kissed it; the one ventured not to ask, nor the other to utter words of hope—a hope that neither of them really felt.

During the whole of that day the malady continued to take a firmer hold of that form, which was too weak and broken to stand against it.

The girl, obedient to the orders of the physician, enforced on her by Ermelinda's still more urgent injunctions, lay in perfect silence and stillness, contenting herself with gazing fixedly on her beloved mother, who was sitting by the bedside, and following her with her eyes whenever anything required her to change her position.

But the repose of the sick-chamber was disturbed at times by distant noises in the castle. Beatrice listened intently; a slight flush suffused her cheeks, and she anxiously asked, "Is he come?"

The mother immediately left the room, but soon returned with a negative reply, at the same time adding a few words of hope and encouragement.

Toward evening the invalid, who felt herself becoming weaker, asked for a confessor, and after a long interview with an old Benedictine friar, who was called in to see her, she expressed a wish to see her parents.

"Listen, my daughter," said the priest to her; "Ottorino is not here, but we expect him at daybreak."

At this she appeared much agitated, and exclaimed, "Ottorino, my husband, my dear husband! Would it had pleased God to grant me the unspeakable favor to be permitted to see him before I die."

"Come, my child," said the pious monk, "resign him to Him who gave him to you, and adore the eternal dispensations of justice and mercy; so will He vouchsafe to accept this sacrifice of your heart as an atonement for your sins, and for your soul's health."

The poor girl clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven, in an attitude of deep but mournful resignation; but Ermelinda, laying her hand gently on her head, exclaimed, "Oh, my daughter! my beloved daughter! have I then to lose you? What is there left to me in this world except you? You, who were my sole consolation and support!"

The girl drooped her head and wept. In a few moments she replied in a voice choked with sobs: "Consolation, did you say? And what consolation did you ever receive from this poor wretched creature, who, by her perversity, has sown so many thorns in the path of your life? Oh, my beloved mother! I do not ask you to forgive me, for I know you have already forgiven me everything. And you, too, my father, have given me your pardon, have you not?"

Ermelinda and the Count, choked by their tears, could not utter a word, and all remained some time in silence. Meantime the waiting-maid, after bringing to the invalid a cordial, had thrown herself on a seat by the side of the bed, and overcome by fatigue and trouble, by degrees let her head drop on the quilt and fell fast asleep.

When Lauretta awoke, the dawn was breaking, and the flame of the lamp at the bedside was growing pale beneath the first beams of day, which appeared through the window. The damsel looked round with astonished eyes, not knowing where she was, till she met Beatrice's kind glance and smile. "You are with me," said the young mistress—"with your own dear Beatrice." Lauretta looked down, sorry and ashamed that her physical fatigue should have made her forget, even for a short time, her beloved lady in her extreme illness. But the latter, guessing this feeling, encouraged her by asking her to perform some slight service for her, and by gratefully receiving those attentions which the maiden, with redoubled anxiety, offered her.

Toward sunrise she said she felt tired, and wished to rest. She lay back, closed her eyes, and had a short, weary, and troubled sleep. Suddenly she started up, raised her head from the pillows, and then let it fall again; a cold perspiration covered her face, she ceased to breathe, and her pulse could not be felt; there was a general fearful belief that she was gone. It was, however, but a passing failure of the heart—a swoon, from which she soon recovered, and looked round on her beloved ones, who were in despair. "Why are you weeping?" she said, "I am still with you."

They came round her, and she, after recovering her breath, turned to her mother and continued: "However, I feel that life is ebbing, and my hour is near; now be calm, and listen to my last words, the last wish of my soul."

She drew a ring from her finger and gave it to her mother, saying, "This was given to me by Ottorino in your presence; the symbol of a union that is to last but for a short time on this earth, but which will be renewed in paradise. If you ever see him again, put it into his hands, for him to show me on some future day. And tell him at the same time that at this solemn moment, expecting soon to find myself alone in my Creator's hands, I make him one last petition, in the name of the love he has borne me, and for the sake of his and my eternal salvation: I implore him never to seek to revenge on anyone the sorrows I have suffered here."

She rested for a moment, and then pointing to the damsel at the foot of the bed: "I need not commend her to you; you have always loved her; but, after all she has well suffered for my sake, and as she has acted a sister's part to me, I hope that she may be to you as a daughter. She will be more obedient than—the one—you have loved too much." And turning to Lauretta: "Will you promise me?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," was the answer, "I will never leave them as long as I live; I will always remain with them."

She now felt her strength fail, and was silent. She remained some time as if dozing, and then opening her eyes slowly, she looked at the window, through which the sun was shining, and murmured to herself, "Oh, my dear mountains!"

The mother drew nearer her, and she, speaking with difficulty and weakness, uttered these words: "There, in the churchyard at Limonta, in the little chapel—where my poor brother lies; where we have prayed and wept together so often—let me rest near him. You can come, then, and weep and pray for us both. I shall have the goodwill of those dear people. Remember me to them all, and poor Marta, who also has a child in that holy place."

The weeping mother answered, more by signs than by words, that all her wishes should be fulfilled. Then the monk, seeing that only a few moments of life remained to the sufferer, put on his stole, blessed her, and began to repeat over her the prayers for those at the point of death. All present knelt around the bed, and made the responses amid their sobs. Beatrice herself appeared to take part in the holy words sometimes by a faint murmur, and sometimes by a slow and devout movement of her head; her serene countenance bore witness to the inward peace of her pious soul, which amid the pains of death tasted the joys of another life.

Suddenly the sacred calm reigning in the sick-room was disturbed by the sound of agitated steps on the staircase. Every eye turned to the door. The seneschal's wife went to meet two persons who now appeared there, and exchanged some words with them. One of the newcomers stopped on the threshold; but the other, darting into the room, flung himself on his knees by the bed, pressed and kissed it, and bathed it with his tears.

Ermelinda, the Count, and Lauretta, at once recognized Ottorino; the others guessed who he must be.

The youth had that moment arrived from the Castle of Binasco, in company with the very man in whose name he had been kept a prisoner there, and who had himself hastened to set him free.

The dying girl, startled by this sudden noise, opened her eyes languidly, and without being able to see who he was—for he was hidden from her by the bystanders—asked what had happened.

"Give God the praise!" exclaimed the confessor with much emotion; "you accepted from his hands a bitter trial, you accepted it even with resignation; now accept in the same spirit the joy he vouchsafes to you, that both the joy and the submission may be pleasing in God's sight."

"Who? Ottorino?" said Beatrice, now in the agony of death, and making a last effort to utter his name.

"Yes; your husband," repeated the priest, and approaching the youth, he made him rise and led him toward her. Beatrice fixed on his face her eyes, shining with a light that was nearly spent, and stretched out one hand, on which he laid his throbbing brow.

After a moment, the dying one drew her hand gently away and held it before her husband's eyes, pointing at the same time to her mother, and attempting to utter some words distinctly.

The monk guessed her desire, and said to the youth: "She wishes to tell you of the wedding-ring which she has given to her mother, and which you will receive from her."

Beatrice's face was lighted up with a smile at her meaning being understood.

Then Ermelinda drew the ring from her finger, and gave it to Ottorino, who kissed it and said: "I shall carry it with me to my grave."

"Your wife has a dying request to make to you," continued the priest; "to the effect that you should lay aside any thought you may have conceived of avenging her. Vengeance belongeth to the Lord."

She kept her eyes anxiously fixed on the young knight's face. He remained with his head lowered, and answered nothing, but the confessor, taking him by the arm: "Now you will promise," he said, in a grave and stern voice, "you will promise your wife, as she is passing from life to death, from time to eternity; she asks it of you as a favor, she imposes it on you as a duty, in the name of that God before whom she is now about to appear."

"Yes, I promise," answered Ottorino, bursting into an agony of tears.

Beatrice thanked him with a look of angelic sweetness, which showed clearly that she had nothing left to desire in this world.

Then the priest signed to those around to kneel again, and he resumed the interrupted prayers. Once only, during a moment of general silence, the dying girl became aware of a sound of repressed sobs which came from the next room, and looked up at her mother, as if asking the meaning of it; the latter only bent her head down, not having the heart to utter a name; but the priest, bending over the dying girl, said in a low voice, "Pray also for him, for him above all; it is Marco Visconti."

The saintly Beatrice bowed her head in obedience to this last injunction. She never raised it again, for she was dead.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CATASTROPHE

MARCO hurried from the room followed by Ottorino, who was deeply agitated, even amid the dire anguish of that fatal hour, by anxiety for the life of his lord. He also felt the necessity of tearing himself away from a spectacle that was more than he could bear, and of setting to work at something that would restore the equilibrium of his mind.

The great captain, drawing his hand across his face and eyes, as if wishing to drive away a dark cloud that obstructed his vision, strode along the gallery till he came to a turret staircase, stopped for a moment before an open door, doubtful whether to enter or not. But all of a sudden he felt suffocated—he must be in the open air—and so continued his hurried ascent of the stairs. Higher and higher he went, till he came out on the leads of a lofty tower; here he stopped to breathe, and to gaze at the magnificent view, then, drooping his head on his breast he folded his arms, and leaned against one of the battlements for some time in silence. His eyes were dry and motionless, his face stern and composed; but on his forehead the phantoms of the fierce thoughts that filled his soul seemed to chase one another in swift succession.

After a while he called to mind his youthful follower, who was standing at a distance, gazing at him in silence, and exclaimed, "Why have you left her?"

"She is in her parents' hands," replied Ottorino.

"True," rejoined Visconti, "and it ill becomes us to stay weeping here, when we ought to be up and doing.

Do you go down that staircase; on the first landing you will find the marshal's room; tell him to send Pelagrua up here, as I wish to ask him a question, and come back with him yourself, as I must have you here."

Ottorino seemed to hesitate, but Marco guessed his thoughts. "Do not fear to leave me here alone," he replied. "What remains to me of life is not mine to dispose of, so long as I have wrongs to avenge, so long as a debt of blood remains on my soul. When anguish shall have been paid for with anguish, then—But, no, Marco never will die a craven's death, despairing like an infidel."

The young man departed. Pelagrua was then in the castle. After the conversation he and Lodrisio had had with Beatrice, the two rascals saw clearly it would be impossible to persuade her to acquiesce in any way in their iniquitous design, so, seeing her strength diminish day by day, they resolved to free themselves from her once for all, she being, so far as they were concerned, an unwelcome, not to say dangerous, encumbrance. The seneschal of Rosate, as was understood, the very same night that Marco arrived in Milan, and at the very moment he was conversing with Ermelinda, had shut up Ottorino's bride and her maid in the dungeon, where he intended to leave them to die; he then went to Fallavecchia, a village near Rosate, and stayed there till late in the evening.

On his return to the castle, little guessing, as may be supposed, the events that had happened in the mean time, he was taken into custody. Being examined by the marshal, at first he tried to put a good face on the matter, but on hearing that Marco was there, and that Beatrice had been discovered, he gave himself up for lost.

Two soldiers then seized him and forced him to go up to the top of the tower. At every step he implored

Ottorino, who was behind him, to help him, and save him from the first outburst of his master's fury. On coming into Marco's presence he fell on his knees, and with his teeth chattering with terror, stammered out a few broken sentences, "Mercy, mercy!—I supposed—I had no bad intentions—I only wanted—but it was Lodrisio—Lodrisio forced me into it—forgive me, and I will tell you, and you will see."

But Visconti, after casting one glance of rage and abhorrence on the wretched creature, instead of listening to his entreaties, glanced over a bundle of papers which one of the two gendarmes had placed in his hands by the marshal's order, then, looking up, he ordered the men to withdraw, and handing the bundle to Ottorino as it was, he said, "These are your letters, which were found in the unhappy girl's room."

The young man took them and began examining them.

Marco again cast his eyes on the seneschal, who lay prostrate before him, groaning and crying for mercy, and giving him a kick on the shoulder, he called out in a voice of thunder, "Get up, you villain!" The wretch obeyed. At the sight of that countenance, in which was a strange mingling of abject terror, malice, and ferocity, the Lord of Rosate felt his blood boil. He paced once or twice to and fro, then stopped close to Pelagrua and began to question him.

"When was Lodrisio here?

But before there was time for an answer Ottorino came up to Marco, and, showing him the letters, exclaimed furiously, "It is a barefaced and cruel lie! These letters are not mine."

Marco snatched the letters from him, and, brandishing them in Pelagrua's face, who trembled more than ever at hearing Ottorino's words, asked him, in a voice choked with passion, "Whose are they, then?"

"It was," stammered the poor wretch—"it was—to obey you—to do you service."

Visconti's eyes flashed fire. "Ugh! you hell-hound!" he roared; and therewith he dealt him such a blow in the face that he broke his jaw, then seizing him, he pitched him headlong from the tower, at the foot of which he was found dead the next morning, impaled on one of the spiked posts in the fosse.

This done, Marco retired to his apartments, and ordered that no one should follow him, not even Ottorino. Here he remained alone till far into the night, searching in the cabinets round the rooms, examining paper after paper, burning the majority, replacing some, annotating others. He then wrote a number of letters, and made his will, wherein, after providing an ample annuity for Pelagrua's widow, and bequeathing legacies to his squires, pages, and the other members of his immense household, he made Ottorino his heir. At midnight he sent for the monk who had attended Beatrice, and desired to be shriven by him; after which he threw himself into an armchair, and slept quietly for about two hours, according to the account given by one of his body servants, who, unperceived by him, had been watching him in silence from an adjoining chamber. When he awoke he called for something to drink, and drank a large beaker of water that was brought him; and then, finding it impossible to sleep again, and not caring to stay there till daybreak, he went out into a gallery and began pacing to and fro like an unquiet spirit, ever intent, amid the silence and darkness of the night, on a feeble light, and a low murmur as of prayer that issued from a chamber opposite.

Meanwhile, Lodrisio, who was in Milan, agitated by innumerable suspicions, owing to the failure of the messenger he had despatched to the Castle of Rosate to return, had sent thither some trusty retainers of his own, who, after a careful investigation of the affair, had informed him of all that had happened; how his letter had fallen into Marco's hands; how Beatrice had been discovered in the dungeons, and was since dead; how Ottorino had been liberated, and the seneschal interrogated, and then put to death by Marco's own hand. From this he saw clearly that, as all his machinations had been detected, no excuse or subterfuge remained whereby he could avert the wrath of his terrible chief, whose confidence he had so cruelly and perfidiously abused.

This miscreant, then, being thus driven to desperation, in order to escape from the punishment due to his last act of treachery, planned and carried out another, still more abominable than the first.

He wrote to Azzone, feigning repentance for his former perfidy, and revealed to him all Marco's machinations for depriving him of the government, by laying before him the most irrefragable proofs, through an infinity of letters and other documents that were in his hands. He sent the letters to their proper addresses, and left word with his servants that if Marco came to ask for him, they were to say he had gone to the palace to see the Viceroy on business. This done, he jumped on his horse, galloped through the Porta Giovia, and never dismounted until he was well outside the boundaries of the Milanese territory.

Marco, beside himself with rage and grief, rushed off to Milan breathing blood and vengeance, and deceived by the false intelligence he obtained at Lodrisio's house, he went straight to the Viceroy's palace, where the reader will easily guess what kind of welcome awaited him.

Leaving the attendant whom he had brought with him in an anteroom, he went forward alone, and asked some of the servants about the culprit of whom he was in search.

"He is in there," replied one of them, pointing to a door, and obsequiously running to open it for him.

Marco went unsuspiciously on, and passing the threshold, entered a long room; but scarcely had he set foot in it, when the door closed behind him with a slam, that sounded like iron, and in an instant, out of various hiding-places, rushed six armed men, clad in mail, with helmets on and visors down, who attacked him from all sides. At the first onset they wounded him in the throat and side; they then threw themselves upon him, one taking him by the shoulders, another round the waist, while a third tried to twist his legs and throw him down. He felt on his left side for his dagger, but could not find it, as one of his assailants had had the presence of mind and dexterity to take it away just at the critical moment. Marco saw that all was over, but determined not to perish without a struggle; so he clenched his fist, which no one had been able to imprison, and let it fall with such force on a man's head who was just giving him a stab in the breast, that the fellow dropped to the ground like a bull knocked down by a sledge-hammer. The others, however, kept pressing upon him, and dragged him, weltering in his blood, to a window looking out on the street; they then took him up by his arms and legs, and with one mighty effort threw him down on the pavement, where he expired in a few minutes.

Nothing was talked of for some time in Milan, Lombardy, and indeed all over Italy, but the sad end of the renowned captain. The dark story of his unsuccessful love was mingled, as may be supposed, with that of his death. Some people believed, or pretended to believe, in order to curry favor with those in power, whose great object was to cast off the odium of that sort of treachery, that Marco himself, having murdered Beatrice in a fit of jealousy, had in despair stabbed himself with his own hand, and thrown himself out of the palace window.

These reports were collected carefully and handed down by some contemporary scribbler, either deceived himself, or too timid to be a lover of truth.

Beyond Lombardy, however, where the fear of the Visconti did not extend, no one doubted that Marco had been assassinated by the order of his nephew and his own brothers. Not to mention other authorities, Giovanni Villani, who was intimately acquainted with Marco at Florence, and had often had dealings with him over the Lucca affair, says so distinctly, and explains the obscurity and uncertainty of our chronicles in regard thereto, in the following significant words: "The Milanese were much shocked by the miserable death of Messer Marco, but no one dared to speak of it for fear of the consequences."

Certain records of the time say that Marco and Beatrice were buried together in the Castle of Rosate. But Visconti was buried with great honors at Milan, in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, and the body of Ottorino's bride was borne to Limonta, according to her last wishes.

The Count and Countess del Balzo, with Lauretta, left Rosate the morning after Beatrice's death, on their way to Limonta, whither they conveyed the remains of their cherished daughter. On the way they were rejoined by those of their household who had been left at Milan.

This party who came from Milan had left it before the dreadful catastrophe of Marco's death, so nothing was heard of it till they reached Leveso, where, having arrived at dusk, they dismounted at a hostelry to pass the night. It was almost impossible to persuade them of the truth of the event, as they had so lately left the city where it was said to have taken place. Lupo and Ambrose were disputing the possibility of the event with the host and some of the villagers, and comparing the hours and distances, when a courier arrived, who, as soon as the fatal news reached Rosate, had started on the track of the Del Balzo family, and had just then rejoined them.

The new arrival was a faithful servant of Visconti, who confirmed, with many tears, the report of his master's fearful end; then, taking Ermelinda aside, he placed in her hands a letter from Marco, found, as he said, on his master's table. The Countess was overcome with mingled horror and pity, which touched her heart deeply, overwhelmed and lacerated as it was by feelings of maternal anguish.

Lupo at once remounted his horse and galloped to Milan in search of Ottorino, who, in this extremity, might require his services. All were stunned at the news, but, compared with the horror and stupefaction of the Count, the wonder of the others was nothing.

And in truth, to have had any connection with Marco, with the man who was said to have been assassinated by the Lord of Milan in consequence of some conspiracy they had discovered, might easily, at that first moment, have alarmed a more timid man than the Count.

But Azzone, frightened perhaps at the extent of the plot he had found out, thought it prudent to draw a veil over it, that he might not risk the consequences of such a crime; so that not only Count del Balzo, not worthy of their consideration on account of his own insignificance, but even Marco's most ardent and powerful supporters were allowed to pass freely without molestation of any kind.

Meanwhile the negotiations went on, which had been on foot for some time, to effect the reconciliation of the Visconti with the Church. The Pope, already disposed to favor the Lord of Milan on account of the late resistance he had made to the Bavarian, did not believe, or pretended not to believe, the reports which accused Azzone of being his uncle's murderer, and having absolved him and his family from excommunication, he took off the interdict which had weighed so heavily and for so many years on the city and province of Milan, The festivities and rejoicings which this caused were marvelous. The lay lords who had usurped the possessions of the clergy restored them to the priests, who were returning from every direction. Among these was the legitimate Abbot of San Ambrogio, Astolfo da Lampugnano, who, on returning to his convent, from which he had so long been excluded, was reinstated in all his former possessions, Limonta included. On his arrival at Milan he wrote a long letter to the parish priest, praising him and all the Limontese for the fidelity they had shown toward their rightful lord, compassionating them for all the vexations they had endured under the usurping abbot, upon whom the usual epithets of schismatic, heretic, magician, son of a demon, were unsparingly heaped, but what was most important to them, he granted them exemptions and privileges as compensation for past evils.

These worthy mountaineers reopened their little Church of St. Bernardo with great solemnity; the bell, making up for its long silence, rang out and chimed thanksgivings for three successive days and nights without intermission. They raised rustic triumphal arches, organized processions, and chanted masses, matins, compline, and vespers, which were novelties. Last of all, they celebrated a general mass for those who had died during the interdict, after which they all walked two and two, men first, women following, into the churchyard, where they knelt and went through their rosaries.

Amid so many recollections of domestic affliction and individual bereavements, the eyes of these good people were turned from time to time on the little chapel, within which had been placed a few days before, a white tombstone, with a name dear to all engraved upon it.

Marta, who had been kneeling on the spot of ground that covered the remains of her Arigozzo, rose to depart when she had finished her prayers, but as she passed near the stone in question, she stooped down and kissed it with reverence and affection; and her example was followed by the falconer's wife and by all the other women of the village in turn—Ermelinda and Lauretta, however, who were still among the congregation, could not bear so great an effort, but returned alone in the evening, going down the mountain paths without being seen, to weep and pray over that grave; and this became every day the termination of their lonely rambles.

Lupo took no part in these solemnities; he had set off with Ottorino for the Holy Land. Now that Beatrice and Marco were dead, the young knight could no longer bear to be beneath his native sky; to feel that he was near Lodrisio made his blood boil. Gladly would he have sought him out, to measure himself against him in mortal combat; but he had promised his dying wife that he would not seek for revenge; that promise being sacred to him, he left his native land in order to keep it.

On that day another of our acquaintances, Tremacoldo, had arrived at Limonta. He was welcomed by Ermelinda as a near and dear relative, in memory of all that he had done and suffered for her poor Beatrice.

Two years after these events Ermelinda died at Limonta, lamented by the whole country. Among her possessions was found, in a small cabinet, Marco's last letter, which she had placed there, together with a small golden chain. No one knew the secret of the chain except the wife of the falconer and her daughter Lauretta, and they never revealed it.

The Count del Balzo lived to a good old age. He witnessed the death of Azzone, and the succession of Luchino. He even survived Luchino and his successor Giovanni.

The time came when Marco was spoken of as a historical character, a great captain, an extraordinary man. His name was mentioned with reverence and admiration.

Lodrisio wandered about for many years in different parts of Italy, until in 1338, with the help of Il Scaligeao, he succeeded in collecting three thousand five hundred knights, a considerable company for that period, besides a good-sized army of infantry.

With this army, which was called the Company of Saint George, and which, at every step, was increased by the addition of thieves, freebooters, and marauders, he advanced upon the Milanese territory, burning and plundering and spreading desolation everywhere along his line of march. On reaching the vicinity of Parabiago, he gave battle to Luchino, who was awaiting him there, backed by all the forces of Milan and her allies. In this famous battle, which took its name from the place where it was fought, he was utterly defeated, and being taken prisoner by his conqueror, he was treated with humanity, a virtue all too rare in those days, and imprisoned with his two sons in the fortress of San Colombano, where he remained a captive till the year 1348. And then? Azzone being dead, and Luchino being dead, he was released by order of the Archbishop Giovanni.

After experiencing various other vicissitudes, he died, in extreme old age, a natural death, at Milan, April 5, 1364. Moreover, he was buried with great pomp, "Magnaliter" as it is called by the chronicler already cited, with a huge display of mourning, and every mark of distinction and honor.

Bernabo, at that time Lord of Milan, caused the tournament to be postponed, which was about to be celebrated; and the princes, nobles, and barons, who had come to Milan for the purpose of attending the joust, were obliged to defer their feats of prowess till after

Lodrisio's obsequqies had been celebrated with due solemnity.

Such things, I repeat, at first sight, might provoke us to an almost ungovernable indignation. However, when we come to reflect more coolly upon them, we recollect that they have been so ordered by a wise Providence, and we become aware that this desire to see everyone rewarded according to his merit in this world, argues impatience, shallowness, and presumption on our part; worse even than that, by so doing we set ourselves up to be wiser than Him who gave us our understanding, and we forget that although it is *here* that we must start on the race of life, it is only *hereafter* that we may hope to receive the prize.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

PQ
4705
G6M313
1907

Grossi, Tommaso
Marco Visconti
[Éd. de luxe]

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY